

TEXAS HIGHER EDUCATION COORDINATING BOARD

Request for Information (RFI)

ApplyTexas System

No. 781-2-00001

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board
1200 East Anderson Lane
Austin, Texas 78752

RFI Post Date: March 28, 2022
Response Deadline: April 18, 2022, by 11:30 p.m. CT

Introduction

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) is a state agency that provides leadership and coordination for higher education in the state of Texas. Texas Education Code § 51.762 requires THECB to adopt a common admission application form for use by persons seeking admission to various types of institutions of higher education. THECB has adopted rules governing the common admission application (hereinafter referred to as ApplyTexas), which can be found in Texas Administrative Code, Title 19, Part 1, Chapter 4, Subchapter A, § 4.10. THECB staffs and maintains the ApplyTexas Advisory Committee (ATAC) established by Texas Education Code § 51.762, and in accordance with Texas Administrative Code, Title 19, Chapter 1, Subchapter G, §§ 1.128-1.134. THECB also convenes, as needed, a negotiated rulemaking committee as authorized under Texas Education Code § 61.0331 to aid in considering the adoption of a policy, procedure, or rule relating to an admission policy regarding the common admission application under Texas Education Code § 51.762.

ApplyTexas was created through a collaborative effort between THECB and the colleges and universities represented on the site. The goal of the project is to offer a centralized means for both Texas resident students and non-Texas resident students to apply to the many outstanding postsecondary institutions available in Texas. The technology stack of ApplyTexas is hosted and maintained by an outside institution, the University of Texas at Austin, under contract and direction of THECB. In addition to the applications for admissions, the ApplyTexas System includes a scholarship application and the Counselor Suite, which allows high school counselors and authorized users to track admission application status and Free Application for Federal Student Aid submission status for students attending their high school. There is also a network of Helpdesks designed to respond to the needs of applicants, institutions, and high school counselors. Additionally, there are a series of regular public reports designed to reflect data such as the number of applicants, applications completed, and the distribution of activities by high school, district, region, and institution. Enhancements to the ApplyTexas applications for admissions, its administrative suite, and the high school counselor service will be coordinated through THECB staff with the advisement of the statutorily established ATAC.

THECB anticipates possibly seeking a new vendor to develop, host, and/or maintain ApplyTexas and is issuing this Request for Information (RFI) to seek feedback and learn more about the best approach to obtain the best solution for the ApplyTexas System. Potential approaches may include, but are not limited to, development of a custom product, implementation of an off-the-shelf product, or hosting and improving the existing system. This work may include refining the state's process for electronic sharing of student records. THECB is particularly interested in hearing input from partners with experience developing and hosting application portals, especially if there is an opportunity to leverage common data flows and user experiences to make institution and other stakeholder work flows more efficient and increase equitable student outcomes.

The current code and patterns are the intellectual property of THECB and will be made available to the entity maintaining the Apply Texas system subject to the terms and

conditions of any executed contract or agreement. It is crucial that all target users can move seamlessly to any updated version of ApplyTexas.

THECB is interested in focusing the development of ApplyTexas around the following three groups of users and goals:

Applicants

ApplyTexas is a crucial tool to propel current and future Texas citizens to high-quality educational programs and credentials of value. Any future version of ApplyTexas must therefore focus on:

- A human-centered design that makes applying to programs easy and intuitive.
- An equity-focused information architecture that supports student applications to high-quality programs where students are likely to succeed.
- Avenues of communication (many of which already exist and just need integration) that allow for caring adults to support student progress.

Institutions of Higher Education

Texas postsecondary institutions rely on ApplyTexas, and the project must therefore also focus on:

- Data and process-flow compatibility with the current platform. Where changes need to be made, they should be clearly necessary and confirmed in time for testing and thorough training.
- Serving the needs of diverse types of institutions, from large private institutions to flagship public institutions, to community colleges.
- A financial model that is aligned with institutional budgets and consistent with continued platform development.

K-12 Partners

Texas K-12 partners rely on the ApplyTexas Counselor Suite and therefore the project must also focus on:

- Information architecture that allows for easy analysis of student-level data including status of applications for admission and financial aid.
- Ensuring security and maintenance of FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act) data.
- The capability for high school registrars and counselors to electronically create and send official student records to Texas public colleges and universities.

Please note that this RFI is not a procurement opportunity; no contract will be developed from a response to this RFI.

Proposed Process for ApplyTexas

The following rough outline represents THECB's possible proposed procurement and development timeline:

- July 2022: Post a Statement of Work or Request for Offers solicitation for migration of ApplyTexas onto new platform
- November 2022: Award contract (which may include subcontractors) and begin strategy design work, informed by strategy and UI/UX research already underway at THECB
- August 2023: Launch full offering and begin continued improvement and development

Request for Information

THECB is interested in gaining information on the following:

- 1) What capabilities and capacities, either alone or with partners, are needed and/or recommended to meet the needs of this project on the outlined timeline?
- 2) What similar projects do you have knowledge of in the market?
- 3) What would be an anticipated (rough, non-binding) approach to completing the project successfully?
- 4) What timelines should be considered for the migration?
- 5) What clarifying questions, or suggested changes, do you have that would give you more confidence in being able to complete this project successfully on schedule? THECB may use these questions and suggestions in crafting the solicitation for this work.
- 6) THECB is focused on long-term value for Texas taxpayers and ensuring the sustainability of this work. How would you suggest THECB think about the long-term commitment of this project, and are there ways to reduce future operating costs through up-front work?

Responses

Responses should not exceed five (5) pages in total.

Responses must be submitted via email to Contracts@highered.texas.gov and received by THECB no later than April 18, 2022, by 11:30 p.m. The subject line of the email should be entitled "Response to RFI – ApplyTexas."

Confidentiality

Vendor responses to this RFI are subject to release under the Texas Public Information Act (PIA), Texas Government Code §§ 552.001-.376. If a responding vendor considers any portion of its response to this RFI to be privileged or confidential, responding vendor

must clearly label the privileged or confidential information and identify the specific PIA exception that applies to disclosure. A blanket statement that the entire response is excepted from disclosure because the response contains some privileged or confidential information is not acceptable and shall make the entire response subject to release under the PIA.

Please Note: Nothing in this document or in any received response commits THECB to engage in any specific work or respond to any specific question from potential vendors.