



TEXAS HIGHER EDUCATION COORDINATING BOARD

Request for Offers (RFO)

**Education Research Center
Data and Dissemination Assistance Project**

No. 781-2-26853

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

NIGP Codes:

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Minimum Eligibility Requirements	3
2.1 Experience	3
2.2 Qualifications	3
2.2.1 Company Profile	3
2.2.2 Key Staff and Qualifications of Key Staff	4
3. Scope of Work	4
3.1 Technical Requirements	5
3.1.1 Data Dictionary Platform	5
3.1.2 Research Project Repository	8
3.1.3 User Profile Management	11
3.1.4 Information Architecture Design & Implementation	11
3.1.5 Stakeholder Engagement	11
3.1.6 Population of Content in Solution	12
3.1.7 Training	12
3.1.8 Integration Plan and Demonstration	12
3.1.9 User Role Definition and Implementation	13
3.1.10 Overall Program Management	13
3.2 Deliverables	13
3.3 Acceptance Criteria	15
4. Reports and Meetings	16
4.1 Reports	16
4.2 Meetings and Communication Plan Between Meetings	16
5. Payment and Pricing Terms	16
5.1 Pricing	16
5.2 Payment Terms and Award Summary	17
5.3 Invoices	17
6. Contract Term and Termination	18
7. Terms and Conditions	18
8. Additional Terms and Conditions	19
8.1 Awarded Respondent's Responsibilities	19
8.2 Intellectual Property Rights in Software	19
8.3 Confidentiality	19

8.4	FERPA Confidentiality and Data Governance Provisions	20
8.5	Technical Documents	21
8.6	Data Center Services Utilization	21
9.	Schedule of Events	21
9.1	Due Date for Proposals	21
9.2	Calendar of Events	22
9.3	Point of Contact	22
10.	Proposal Format and Content	23
10.1	RFO Attachments	23
10.2	Organization of the Proposal for Submission	23
10.3	Additional Considerations	28
11.	Proposal Evaluation Criteria	28
12.	Additional Instructions	30
12.1	Accuracy of the Proposal	30
12.2	Cost of Submitting the Proposal	30
12.3	Public Information Act Disclosures	30
12.4	Irrevocability of the Proposal	31
12.5	Conflicting RFO Language	31

1. Introduction

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) is a state agency that provides leadership and coordination for Texas higher education. THECB's leadership role includes coordination of research for evaluation study use of the state's rich pre-Kindergarten through postsecondary and workforce data resources within a longitudinal data system that serves to benefit the state.

THECB is seeking a vendor (or vendors) to build an online portal with tools and functionality to be developed to ease the learning curve for new researchers and enhance efficiency for experienced researchers and other stakeholders using the Texas pre-Kindergarten through postsecondary education and workforce administrative data.

Texas Education Code §§ 1.005 and 1.006 specifically authorize the establishment of up to three Education Research Centers (ERCs) at institutions of higher education in Texas to "conduct education and workforce preparation studies or evaluations for the benefit of this state" using data from the Texas Education Agency (TEA), THECB, and the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC). Data residing at an ERC may include confidential student or other individual data, provided that the ERC complies with state and federal laws, including the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), 42 U.S.C. § 1232g, and implements processes for safeguarding the confidentiality and security of these data sets. Currently, the three ERCs are located at the University of Houston, The University of Texas at Austin, and The University of Texas at Dallas. Each of the three centers operates under its own contractual agreement with THECB.

Texas Education Code §§ 1.005 and 1.006 and Texas Administrative Code, Title 19, Part 1, Subchapter A, Rules 1.17 and 1.18, also allow for a process for researchers to submit proposals for a study or evaluation for approval by the ERC Advisory Board, subject to initial review and sponsorship of an ERC. Once a proposal is approved and the researcher has completed all requirements for gaining access to the ERC data approved for the project, the ERC may then allow the researcher secure access to data. The researcher must agree not to reveal, remove, or compromise the confidentiality of any data accessed at an ERC and must agree to an ERC review of aggregate research results to ensure they do not reveal the identity of any individual before results are removed from an ERC or disseminated. Thus, each ERC allows access to the data and use of research and statistical analysis software within the firewall of its own secure technical architecture and environment, and no approved individual when actively accessing ERC data is allowed access to the Internet or other applications and networks when actively logged into an ERC session.

The ERC Advisory Board began actively approving researchers for ERC projects in early 2009. Since then, researchers ranging in experience from novice through distinguished career trajectories have either completed or are actively engaged in one of the more

than 280 projects on widely varying topics. Researchers from over 100 ERC projects have produced research briefs or related documents/publications that have been shared with THECB, with many posted on ERC websites.

Given the range of researcher experience levels and the quantity of research productivity over the past twelve years, researchers and ERC staff have noted the steep learning curve and time investment required of most researchers who aspire to conduct research using the ERC data. Many of these researchers have encountered advanced online tools and functionality available through other academic institutions, government agencies, or other organizations that allow researchers to access and use their data with greater ease and efficiency, thereby flattening the learning curve and learning time necessary for conducting research. In addition, researchers must pay fees for access to data and resources at the ERCs, which makes efficient use of time a top priority. Fees are charged to researchers, in part, because ERCs must be self-supporting.

In response to the challenges reported by researchers in learning about the ERC data needed for their research projects and by the ERC staff who help with researchers' orientation in the use of ERC data, an initial convening, "Making the Most of the ERCs," was held in the fall of 2018. This small convening included staff from the ERCs, TEA, THECB, and TWC plus several researchers with ERC projects.

Project Summary:

A summary of researcher suggestions for improving the ease and efficiency in using ERC data, disseminating results from ERC research, and promoting the use of research results was used to inform a THECB subgrant proposal within TEA's overall Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) proposal to and award from the U.S. Department of Education. See [Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems Grant Program - Grant Information \(ed.gov\)](#) for more detail on the federal SLDS grant program. TEA's subgrant award to THECB from its overall SLDS grant award provides the funding for this solicitation, the 2020-2022 Education Research Center Data and Dissemination Assistance (ERC-DDA) Project. See the initial opportunity at: [GrantProgramDetails \(state.tx.us\)](#). The current funding period extends through November 30, 2022.

The ERC-DDA Project funds will be used to provide an online portal with tools and functionality to be developed to ease the learning curve for new researchers and enhance efficiency for experienced researchers and other stakeholders using the Texas pre-Kindergarten through postsecondary education and workforce administrative data made available through the ERCs.

Resources proposed for development include a:

1. Searchable Data Dictionary and

2. Searchable Researcher/Research Project Repository, with
3. Related Community Features and Discussion Functionality.

THECB is seeking a Respondent or multiple Respondents to identify and customize any existing tools and resources providing such functionality **and** to develop any necessary tools and resources that will accomplish the stated objectives for this project and the requirements specified in Section 3, Scope of Work, below. The ideal solution will offer a seamless integration of these tools, resources, and functionality available to researchers as they work within the secure technical environment of their specific ERC host, as required by federal and state statutes, rules, and policies.

2. Minimum Eligibility Requirements

2.1 Experience

Respondents must have a minimum of five years' experience providing services like those described in the Scope of Work, Section 3, below. An entity or company in existence for fewer than five years is eligible to submit a Proposal if key personnel on the proposal team have the minimum required experience. Respondents who do not meet this requirement are not eligible for award.

THECB encourages Historically Underutilized Businesses to compete for this award.

2.2 Qualifications

2.2.1 Company Profile

Respondents must demonstrate their knowledge and expertise of the environment (e.g., platforms, software, applications, security, network, tools, etc.) for which work is to be performed. Respondents' employees and/or subcontractors (proposed project personnel) must have the appropriate background experience to perform the work required under this Request for Offers (RFO). Respondents must submit a Company Profile that outlines their experience and expertise in the areas of data documentation, research dissemination, and associated information architecture, including their capability to perform the required services. Relevant examples may be summarized or included in the Respondent's Company Profile that reference or demonstrate its and its proposed project personnel's expertise and capability to perform the required services.

The following shall be included with the Company Profile:

- Organization chart;

- Management team resumes;
- Description of previous interactions with the Data Center Services (DCS) program (see Section 8.6 and Attachment A for more information); and
- Key personnel resumes, illustrating the qualifications of each individual (including experience and expertise described above) to perform the services described in this RFO.

2.2.2 Key Staff and Qualifications of Key Staff

Respondents must provide staff who are fully knowledgeable of the work required under this RFO. Proposed key staff must have the appropriate background skills, knowledge, experience, and training. Evidence of qualifications must be included in the Company Profile.

3. Scope of Work

Project Context and Background

While the solution and any solution components resulting from this RFO may be used or modified for future agencywide solutions and collaborations that THECB may require, the scope of this project is focused on ERC researcher and related ERC stakeholder needs.

Overall Solution Description

The primary users of the ERC-DDA solution are researchers.

The overall ERC-DDA solution will provide a “single portal” experience for researchers and stakeholders. While the ERC-DDA solution may consist of more than one software platform, website, or system, the result will be a seamless user journey with a single point of entry for browsing, searching, and accessing resources published to the platform(s).

The primary elements of the platform are a browsable, searchable data dictionary; a browsable, searchable research repository; and a set of features for the research community to discuss and comment on the resources in the repository – each described in more detail below.

This solution will only hold publicly shareable information such as data documentation, output from research, synthetic data as available, reference data based on public sources, and so on. The ERC-DDA solution will NOT disseminate

non-sharable, FERPA-protected, individual-level source data or any other information raising privacy concerns.

3.1 Technical Requirements

Awarded Respondent shall provide solution design, technical, analytical, and project management support to establish and populate an online Data Dictionary and Research Project Repository, including integration of Community Features and Discussion capability into both. Key solution elements and activities are described in the sections that follow.

3.1.1 Data Dictionary Platform.

A scalable, browsable, searchable, online Data Dictionary Platform to support ERC researchers in understanding data definitions and code lists for TEA, TWC, and THECB data provided to researchers working on or seeking approval for research projects to be done within an ERC.

- a. **General Description.** This solution will serve as a general reference for data definitions, data models, file formats, and specifications relevant to ERCs. While the term “Data Dictionary” is used throughout this RFO, the feature set herein defines a system to host documentation that is often called a “Data Handbook,” “Data Cookbook,” “Metadata Repository,” or similar: a system capable of providing data specifications as well as data context, usage, history, and other metadata about the specifications.
- b. **Illustrative Data Dictionary Content.** Examples of current documentation for the types and years of data held by the ERCs can be found at: [Texas ERC Data \(utexas.edu\)](http://utexas.edu), [Data Documentation \(utexas.edu\)](http://utexas.edu), and [UH-ERC Data Warehouse - University of Houston](http://uh-erc.org). This information is representative of the core type of documentation that will populate the Data Dictionary platform.
- c. **Illustrative Solutions.** Stakeholders identified the following systems as examples of the Data Dictionary features required. *These examples are illustrative only, and do not indicate a recommendation or preference on the part of THECB about the eventual solution:*
 - i. [GSS Data Explorer](http://nces.ed/ipeds/dataexplorer) (including the variable search; a noteworthy feature is the good visualization of “years available” for each data point)
 - ii. [NCES Online Codebook](http://nces.ed/ipeds/codebook)

- iii. [TWEDS](#) (Texas Student Data System Web-Enabled Data Standards, published by the Texas Education Agency)
- iv. [Data Cookbook](#) (a commercial solution which powers the [Brown University Data Cookbook](#))

d. Key Functional Requirements.

- i. Support for multiple data dictionaries (e.g., to describe specifications for multiple data collections and data exchange)
- ii. Support for versioning of data dictionaries, entities, and elements (e.g., through linking between versions, indications that later versions exist)
- iii. Support for narrative documentation pages (e.g., to describe data domains, provide contextual information about collection specifications)
- iv. Support for abstract and concrete data documentation (e.g., supporting documentation for reference models with general data types and collection specifications with technical data definitions)
- v. Allow for client-added custom fields on definitions (i.e., the platform must have an extensible datastore)
- vi. Support for following entity and element definitions:
 - 1. Core metadata (domain, element name, definition, data type, optionality, nullability)
 - 2. Code lists (for enumerations, descriptors, value lists, includes list names, values, definitions, alphabetic and custom sort orders)
 - 3. Descriptive data
 - 4. Example data values
 - 5. Collection grouping (group elements into specific formats)
 - 6. Cross-referencing
 - 7. Synonyms (i.e., other names, “also known as” values, acronyms, by which an element or entity is known)
 - 8. Thesaurus (i.e., direct or indirect technical mapping between fields)
 - 9. Usage
 - 10. Definition Status (active, inactive)

- 11. Active Dates
- vii. Support for classification metadata such as categories and tags
- viii. Simple and advanced search, including:
 - 1. Keyword search
 - 2. Search within fields, for specific types, active dates
 - 3. Use and relationship search, for connections between data collections in which data elements are used
 - 4. Classification metadata search, by category and tag, other metadata search such as last update date
- ix. Simple workflow, including:
 - 1. Publication status tracking (e.g., draft, in review, published)
 - 2. Pre-publication review by user or role (e.g., for peer review, content proofreading)
 - 3. Content approval (e.g., role-based permissions around making information public)
- x. Support for Community Features such as:
 - 1. Ability for logged-in users to comment on data or research using specific ERC data
 - 2. Ability for logged-in users to edit or delete their own comments
 - 3. Ability for logged-in users to contact ERC researchers regarding data used or referenced in their ERC research projects or published research material

e. General Requirements.

- i. The solution should comply with all the applicable security, accessibility, and compliance requirements
- ii. Secure, web-based interface for roles such as end users, content administrators, and system administrators
- iii. Integration with THECB Single-Sign On (SSO) powered by Azure AD B2C
- iv. Role-based access control
- v. Change log or audit trail

- vi. Printable/PDF documentation for dictionaries, specifically including:
 1. Dictionary documentation, including code lists associated with the dictionary
 2. Data element use (e.g., collections in which a data element is used)
 3. Changes over time (e.g., years in which a data element is present, changes in definition)
- vii. User interfaces that meet or exceed [state accessibility requirements](#), including WCAG 2.0 Level [AA](#), and preferably Level [AAA](#) in compliance with Texas Administrative Code, Title 1, Part 10, Chapters 206 and 213.

3.1.2 *Research Project Repository.*

A scalable, browsable, searchable Research Project Repository to support the dissemination and sharing of research results from ERC researchers. Includes community features to comment on or ask questions regarding published information.

1. **General Description.** The Research Project Repository provides a means to disseminate research and study results, information about results and underlying datasets, and track the status of specific projects.
2. **Illustrative Solutions.** Stakeholders identified the following systems as examples of the Research Project Repository features required. *These examples are illustrative only, and do not indicate a recommendation or preference on the part of THECB about the eventual solution:*
 - i. [Socrata](#) (which provides the platform for the [Texas Open Data Portal](#))
 - ii. [CKAN](#) (which powers [Data.gov](#), among [other](#) national, state, and local sites)
 - iii. [ICPSR](#) (hosted by University of Michigan)
 - iv. [Collectica](#) (which powers [Stats.nz](#))
3. **Key Functional Requirements.**
 - i. Support for narrative and file-based information (e.g., covering material such as an abstract, along with results in PDF)

- ii. Support for the following data and information:
 - 1. Project or dataset title
 - 2. Descriptive elements such as abstracts, project overviews, methodology narrative
 - 3. Project status
 - 4. Project ID
 - 5. Project sponsor
 - 6. Contact information for institution, researcher
 - 7. Connections and cross-references to other studies
 - 8. Research or creator technical notes (e.g., data cleansing techniques used, methods of joining datasets)
 - 9. Document attachments, including copy of research study publications and related documents (e.g., PDF, Word, Excel)
 - 10. Code snippet attachments (sharable code such as statistics package code, queries, transformations)
 - 11. Dataset attachments (e.g., for supporting FERPA-compliant sample output, or synthetic data suitable for publication)
 - 12. Data sources used
 - 13. Dataset- and dataset-specific data documentation (documentation for any data provided with research or otherwise informative of methodology)
- iii. Metadata regarding:
 - 1. Area of focus
 - 2. Research and data characteristics (e.g., cohort information, outcomes studied)
 - 3. Study design or methodology
 - 4. Citation, copyright, and license information
- iv. Support for simple and advanced search by:
 - 1. Keyword
 - 2. Specific field (e.g., project title, research organization, Project ID)
 - 3. Data use and lineage search (e.g., finding data fields by collections or reports in which the field is used)

- v. Support for Community Features such as:
 - 1. Ability for logged-in users to comment on research or data
 - 2. Ability for logged-in users to edit or delete their own comments
 - 3. Ability for logged-in users to contact researchers affiliated with published material
- vi. Community content review and moderation features, such as:
 - 1. Ability to require content moderator review before publishing community content
 - 2. Ability for authorized content moderator users to view a list of community content requiring review
 - 3. Ability for authorized content moderators to edit and delete others' comments
- vii. Simple workflow, including:
 - 1. Publication status tracking (e.g., draft, in review, published)
 - 2. Pre-publication review by user or role (e.g., for peer review, content proofreading)
 - 3. Content approval (e.g., role-based permissions around making information public)

4. General Requirements.

- i. Capability to integrate with other platforms
- ii. Secure, web-based interface for users and administrators
 - 1. Integration with THECB Single-Sign On (SSO)
- iii. Role-based authorization
- iv. Change log or audit trail
- v. The ideal solution will support relevant open standards such as the Data Documentation Initiative, or [DDI](#)
- vi. Printable/PDF documentation for dictionaries, specifically including:
 - 1. Dictionary documentation, including code lists associated with the dictionary
 - 2. Data element use (e.g., collections in which a data element is used)

3. Changes over time (e.g., years in which a data element is present, changes in definition)
- vii. Export capability, including:
 1. Excel
 2. CSV or text format
 3. DDI

3.1.3 *User Profile Management.*

The User Profile Management feature should allow a registered user to create a profile that stores the user's contact information, save searches and queries, and receive updates that are relevant to their research interests.

3.1.4 *Information Architecture Design & Implementation.*

The detailed information in the Data Dictionary and Shared Research Repository must be browsable and searchable (e.g., by hierarchical categories, tags, indices, metadata, keywords, and similar). Awarded Respondent will perform the following information architecture tasks:

- a. **Overall Site Map.** Develop an overall site map for ERC information, with particular attention on creating a seamless experience for end-users between the Data Dictionary and shared Research Repository features.
- b. **Information Architecture.** Develop an information architecture including a taxonomy, hierarchy, and shared vocabulary for the solution. The solution should include research-domain-specific elements (e.g., study type, domain, subject area), Texas-specific elements (e.g., study sponsor agencies and research centers), and common information system metadata (e.g., file type, data type, publication data, update date). The information hierarchy present in Sections 3.1.1 and 3.1.2 "Illustrative Solutions" above provide examples. THECB envisions this formal information architecture will be maintained by content and system administrators.
- c. **Define "Informal" Approach.** Define an approach for authorized users to tag or label content. This "informal" information architecture is intended to allow end-users to have some ability for local or ad hoc categorization.

3.1.5 *Stakeholder Engagement.*

Provide a plan for engaging key stakeholders, in collaboration with and as designated by the THECB project team, that provides opportunities for:

(a) scheduled discussions with appropriate agency and ERC contacts regarding end-user requirements; (b) stakeholder feedback resulting from demonstrations of work in progress on solution development and features; and (c) participation in conferences with stakeholders, as requested.

3.1.6 Population of Content in Solution.

Gather information from THECB, TEA, TWC, and ERC contact persons and sites designated by THECB for Data Dictionary and Research Repository information.

3.1.7 Training.

Provide a plan, process, and set of materials for training Administrators/Super-Users, End-Users, Content Moderators, and Content Reviewers in administering, as appropriate, and in using the Data Dictionary and Research Repository platforms and related Community Features. Training materials should be accessible to administrators and users within the Data Dictionary and Research Repository platforms and be flexible enough to allow for modifications (e.g., updates, additions, and improvements) after the expiration date of the contract term.

3.1.8 Integration Plan and Demonstration.

The solution will rarely be the operational system or original source for the information it contains. Rather, the Data Dictionary and Shared Research Repositories are a publication and reference system. For this reason, it is essential that the solution be able to share information with other systems. Awarded Respondent will:

- a. Approach for Information Exchange.** Define and document a means of importing information into and exporting information from the Data Dictionary solution.
- b. Approach for Connecting to Similar Systems.** Define and document a means of connecting the Shared Research Repository to other systems of a similar type through federation.
- c. Approach for Integration.** Integration between the ERC Shared Research Repository and existing systems such as the Texas Open Data Portal is out of scope for this project. However, Awarded Respondent will be responsible for demonstrating the federation features of the solution during the course of this project.

3.1.9 *User Role Definition and Implementation.*

THECB currently envisions a minimum of three authenticated roles for the solution: End-User (minimum privilege, but permissions to add and view comments, use ad-hoc tagging features); Content Administrator (elevated user privilege, permissions to moderate comments, publish and remove local content); and System Administrator (super-user privileges, platform administration). Awarded Respondent will:

- a. **Role Refinement.** Refine roles with input from THECB and stakeholders.
- b. **External Administrator Roles.** Work with state agency (e.g., Department of Information Resources, TEA, and/or TWC) and ERC security administrators at the University of Houston, The University of Texas at Austin, and The University of Texas at Dallas, as appropriate, to establish roles in THECB's SSO environment.
- c. **Role-Based Authorization.** Document and implement role-based authorization for the solution.

3.1.10 *Overall Program Management.*

Awarded Respondent will bear sole responsibility for this project meeting its goals and objectives.

3.2 **Deliverables**

The listed deliverables do not represent an exhaustive list. Deadlines for each deliverable and any relevant specifics will be established jointly between THECB and Awarded Respondent.

To affect the timely acceptance of deliverables as outlined in Acceptance Criteria below, it is expected that all project deliverables will be reviewed early and often by THECB.

Awarded Respondent will deliver:

1. **Project Plan and Project Control Documents.** Project management documentation, including roles and responsibilities and a rollout plan with key milestones.
2. **Information Architecture and Documentation.** Overall organization of all resources, keywords, categorizations, search terms, and related metadata.

3. **Data Dictionary Platform.** Data Dictionary solution, configured for use with core information architecture in place.
4. **Shared Research Repository Platform.** Hosted instance of Data Dictionary solution, with core information architecture in place.
5. **Data Dictionary Content.** Core data dictionary definitions, uploaded and entered into the Data Dictionary Platform. Awarded Respondent will be responsible for import or other entry of three to five (3-5) distinct dictionaries designated by the THECB project team (e.g., each distinct dictionary representing specifications such as for a single data collection).
6. **Shared Research Repository Content.** Initial content population of Shared Research publications and related documents, including keyword assignment, categorization, and a relatively comprehensive set of metadata to serve as examples for future use. Awarded Respondent will be responsible for initial entry of ten to fifteen (10-15) shared studies designated by the THECB project team (assuming three to five (3-5) per ERC).
7. **Documentation for End-Users, Content Moderators, and Content Reviewers.** Includes new content publication guide, plus content for data stewards, moderators, and any other content reviewer roles.
8. **Training Material for Administrators/Super-Users, End-Users, Content Moderators, and Content Reviewers.** A presentation of essential and select material from the documentation, suitable for administrator and user training that is accessible online, as appropriate by administrator or user role, via the Data Dictionary and Research Repository platforms.
9. **Project Summary Report with Suggested Next Steps.** This project will result in a living, operational solution. The summary and next steps will provide a roadmap for future activities and updates. As noted below in Section 6, the anticipated contract term ends on November 30, 2022. This final deliverable must be accepted by November 15, 2022.

In service of the above tangible deliverables, Awarded Respondent is expected to coordinate, schedule, and conduct the following activities in addition to status meetings and requirement review sessions with THECB project team:

10. **Requirement Refinement Sessions with ERCs.** THECB has conducted several stakeholder meetings with ERCs, which form the basis of the core requirements for this project. During this project, Awarded Respondent will

engage directly with ERC stakeholders as directed by THECB to refine requirements.

11. Content Gathering from THECB, TEA, TWC, and ERCs. This project includes the population of an initial set of data and information in the Data Dictionary and Shared Research Repository solutions. Awarded Respondent is expected to work with THECB-designated representatives from THECB, TEA, TWC, and the ERCs to solicit content for initial population in the new platforms.

12. End-User and Content Reviewer Training Sessions. This project includes the delivery of training for representative/invited end-users at ERCs (i.e., the providers and consumers of the information in the solution) and content reviewers (i.e., those specially designated to review content or moderate communication). This is envisioned as a one-time activity near the conclusion of the project.

3.3 Acceptance Criteria

Awarded Respondent shall comply with the following acceptance criteria:

Actionable Deliverables which successfully meet all requirements outlined in the RFO shall be provided by the specified dates. Any changes to delivery dates must have prior approval in writing by THECB.

All Deliverables must be submitted in a format approved by THECB. THECB has the sole responsibility of determining the completeness of Awarded Respondent's work. THECB will complete a review of each submitted deliverable within a mutually agreed upon timeframe from the date of receipt.

In the event THECB does not approve a Deliverable, Awarded Respondent will be notified in writing with the specific reasons. Awarded Respondent will have seven (7) business days to correct the unaccepted Deliverable.

Awarded Respondent shall correct any latent defects identified after the acceptance of a Deliverable where appropriate at no additional charge to THECB.

4. Reports and Meetings

4.1 Reports

Awarded Respondent is required to provide reports (see *also* 3.2 Deliverables for reference) in the format and manner prescribed by THECB throughout the life of the project including:

1. Project Plan and Management details including Project Control Documents with key milestones, schedule of regular status meetings and requirement review sessions with THECB project team, and monthly status reports.
2. Information Architecture and Documentation including overall organization and documentation of all resources, core information architecture for the Data Dictionary and Research Repository Platforms, and related discussion features for the platforms.
3. Content Gathering and Requirements Refinement processes and Content Organization and Population processes/documentation for the Data Dictionary and Research Repository Platforms including relevant discussion features completed.
4. Documentation and Training Materials for End-Users, Content Moderators, and Content Reviewers including Training Material for Administrators/Super-Users and one-time training for representative/invited end-users and content reviewers.
5. Project Summary Report with Suggested Next Steps that describes the living, operational solution and roadmap for future activities and updates.
6. Other Reports upon request by THECB.

4.2 Meetings and Communication Plan Between Meetings

Meetings may be scheduled via teleconference/videoconference or in-person as mutually agreed upon between THECB and Awarded Respondent. Ad hoc meetings may occur, as necessary. Awarded Respondent must maintain communications to address issues that arise between meetings or progress reports.

5. Payment and Pricing Terms

5.1 Pricing

Respondent's pricing must be all-inclusive, covering all services required to provide all deliverables as described in this RFO, including travel expenses,

personnel costs, and all other necessary expenses required in the performance of the engagement.

Respondent shall propose pricing based on key deliverables/milestones using the format below or similar format to adequately describe deliverables and pricing structure. **Submit this information on an EXCEL document in the format below.**

Respondent Pricing Sheet		
Deliverable No.	Deliverable Name/Description	Price
1.		

5.2 Payment Terms and Award Summary

Awarded Respondent will be reimbursed for deliverables completed and approved by THECB. Awarded Respondent will submit invoices to THECB that detail the itemized associated costs of the services rendered or deliverables completed.

To the extent Awarded Respondent is not a Texas state agency, THECB will make payments for services in accordance with the Texas Prompt Payment Laws, Texas Government Code §§ 2251.001-.055. If Awarded Respondent is a Texas state agency, THECB will make payments for services in accordance with the Interagency Cooperation Act, Texas Government Code §§ 771.001-.010.

Awarded Respondent agrees not to begin or provide any services until issuance of a contract by THECB. THECB does not guarantee specific compensation to Awarded Respondent throughout the term of the engagement. Awarded Respondent is not guaranteed minimum compensation.

THECB will not apply for credit nor will THECB prepay. THECB shall pay, subject to the terms of the Texas Prompt Payment Laws, upon the receipt of a properly submitted invoice after all goods and services have been received and applicable Deliverables have been approved by THECB.

At THECB's sole discretion, THECB may award the contract to the most qualified Respondent successfully meeting the criteria and conditions as outlined in this RFO. THECB reserves the right to award a contract to multiple Respondents.

5.3 Invoices

Upon completion of a deliverable and acceptance by THECB based on the requirements and acceptance criteria set forth in this RFO, Awarded Respondent may submit an invoice to THECB setting forth amounts due in accordance with the Terms and Conditions of this RFO and the anticipated contract.

To receive payment, Awarded Respondent must submit an invoice to accountspayable@highered.texas.gov and the designated THECB Contract Manager(s). The invoice must include the following minimum information:

1. Awarded Respondent's mailing and e-mail (if applicable) address;
2. Awarded Respondent's telephone number;
3. The name and telephone number of a person designated by Awarded Respondent to answer questions regarding the invoice;
4. THECB's name, agency number (781), and delivery address;
5. The THECB purchase order number, if applicable;
6. The contract number or other reference number, if applicable;
7. A valid Texas identification number (TIN) issued by the comptroller;
8. A description of the goods or services, in sufficient detail to identify the order which relates to the invoice;
9. The unit numbers corresponding to the amount of the invoice;
10. If submitting an invoice after receiving an assignment of a purchaser order, the TIN of the original vendor and the TIN of the successor vendor; and
11. Other relevant information supporting and explaining the payment requested.

Prior to any payment being made, THECB shall certify that the goods and services being invoiced have been received and approved for payment by THECB. Payments will be made in accordance with Section 5.2 above.

6. Contract Term and Termination

THECB shall pay Awarded Respondent for the reasonable and approved costs incurred by Awarded Respondent in connection with the contract during the period beginning upon execution and ending on November 30, 2022, unless extended or terminated as otherwise provided for in the contract. Subject to proper approvals, the parties may amend the contract to extend the contract term, provided both parties agree in writing to do so, prior to the expiration date. Any extensions shall have the same terms and conditions, plus any approved changes.

7. Terms and Conditions

See Attachment D, Anticipated Contract

8. Additional Terms and Conditions

8.1 Awarded Respondent's Responsibilities

THECB shall look solely to Awarded Respondent for compliance with all the requirements of this RFO and any resulting contract. Awarded Respondent shall be the sole point of contract responsibility and shall not be relieved of non-compliance of any subcontractor.

Failure to meet service requirements and/or specifications authorizes THECB to procure services of this RFO elsewhere and charge any increased costs for the services, including the cost of re-soliciting, to Awarded Respondent.

8.2 Intellectual Property Rights in Software

THECB and Awarded Respondent acknowledge and agree that intellectual property or other property produced, generated, or created in connection with the contract that Awarded Respondent had not previously produced, generated, or created, either completed or partially completed, shall be THECB's sole property and all rights, title, and interest in and to the work product shall vest in THECB upon payment for the services. To the extent any pre-existing material or property is utilized in the development of the solution(s) discussed herein, Awarded Respondent warrants that it is licensed to use the material or property. Further, Awarded Respondent acknowledges that the ensuing agreement between THECB and Awarded Respondent will award to THECB an irrevocable license to utilize any pre-existing material or property required for the maintenance of the solution(s) discussed herein.

8.3 Confidentiality

Except as required by applicable law, including but not limited to Texas Government Code Chapter 552, Awarded Respondent, including its employees, agents, board members, and subcontractors, shall not: i) disclose to any third-party the business of THECB, details regarding the website or application, including, without limitation any information regarding the website and application code, the specifications, or THECB's business (the "Confidential Information"); (ii) make copies of any Confidential Information or any content based on the concepts contained within the Confidential Information for personal use or for distribution unless requested to do so by THECB; or (iii) use Confidential Information other than solely for the benefit of THECB.

8.4 FERPA Confidentiality and Data Governance Provisions

FERPA. Awarded Respondent agrees to comply with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1232g, and the implementing federal regulations, 34 C.F.R. Part 99; the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA); and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). It is understood and agreed that Awarded Respondent shall not be required to access student level or any other FERPA confidential data in order to provide the services required under this RFO, and THECB agrees not to knowingly provide Awarded Respondent with access to such information. Awarded Respondent shall not knowingly view, access, acquire, transfer, copy, or otherwise reproduce any student level or other FERPA confidential data.

Data Security. Awarded Respondent warrants that it has a sound data security program, that, at a minimum, meets industry standards, that protects both data at rest and data in transmission. Awarded Respondent shall ensure that proper information security controls are in place and shall comply with all requirements and security protocols found in Title 1, Texas Administrative Code, Chapter 202, Texas Cybersecurity Framework Standards, and other applicable laws, including FERPA. Awarded Respondent shall notify THECB of any data breach involving education records, personally identifiable information (PII), or any other confidential or sensitive information *not later than twenty-four (24) hours after discovery of a security incident that may constitute a data breach*. Awarded Respondent shall immediately mitigate any such breach and ensure that any disrupted services are timely and without delay, brought back into service. Awarded Respondent shall be responsible for any data breach notifications and damages that are required by state or federal law and shall coordinate such notification with THECB. This section shall survive termination of the agreement.

Cloud Computing/TX RAMP. If applicable, Awarded Respondent represents and warrants that it has demonstrated compliance with the requirements of the Cloud Computing State Risk and Authorization Management Program found in Texas Government Code § 2054.0593. (See also <https://dir.texas.gov/texas-risk-and-authorization-management-program-tx-ramp>.) Awarded Respondent further agrees to maintain program compliance and certification throughout the term of the engagement with THECB.

Pursuant to Texas Government Code § 2054.138, to the extent that Awarded Respondent is authorized to access, transmit, use, or store THECB data, Awarded Respondent agrees to meet all security controls that THECB determines are

proportionate with THECB's risk under the contract based on the sensitivity of the THECB data.

8.5 Technical Documents

All technical documents developed or procured by Awarded Respondent shall not be proprietary in nature, such that THECB is limited in the use of such documents. If any such documents are proprietary, including training materials, Awarded Respondent must identify such documents and provide THECB with any technical support and training for use of such documents, prior to the transfer of such documents to THECB.

8.6 Data Center Services Utilization

Texas Government Code § 2054.391 requires THECB to utilize the services of the Data Center Services (DCS) program for all hosted solutions, unless otherwise approved by the Department of Information Resources (DIR) through a Data Center Services Exemption. Awarded Respondent warrants that all hosted solutions offered in response to this RFO (including custom developed application, commercial off-the-shelf (COTS), and Portal or Website managed content) will be hosted in the DCS program, using either public or private cloud compute and DCS managed services provided. If Respondent intends to propose a Software as a Service (SaaS), then Respondent must demonstrate that the solution clearly meets the National Institute of Standards and Technology standard definition of SaaS. If Respondent intends to propose a SaaS, Respondent further acknowledges that THECB will be required to request and receive a DCS program exemption from DIR before a purchase order can be issued to Respondent. Respondents should provide one technical solution: either SaaS or DCS hosted and managed.

For more information, see Attachment A: Department of Information Resources (DIR) Shared Technology Services Policy Document

9. Schedule of Events

9.1 Due Date for Proposals

Respondents shall submit Proposals to THECB no later than the Proposal Due Date indicated in the Calendar of Events section below. Proposals received after the Proposal deadline will be rejected for being late and will not be considered for evaluation.

9.2 Calendar of Events

The solicitation process for this RFO will proceed according to the schedule below. THECB reserves the right to revise this schedule or any portion of this RFO by published addendum on THECB's website.

EVENT	DEADLINE
Publication of RFO on the Electronic State Business Daily (ESBD) and THECB's Website	April 22, 2022
Last Day to Submit Written Questions	May 2, 2022, 11:30 p.m. CT
THECB's Response to Written Questions	May 9, 2022
Proposal Due Date and Time	May 23, 2022, 11:30 p.m. CT
Post-Proposal Interviews/Presentations, if required	TBD, if required
Anticipated Contract Start Date	June 30, 2022

THECB will only accept written questions and requests for clarification via email to the Point of Contact listed below. THECB will post responses to written questions on the ESBD and THECB's website.

9.3 Point of Contact

Respondents shall direct all inquiries, written questions, requests for clarification, and communications concerning this RFO to the Point of Contact listed below. Inquiries and comments must reference RFO No. 781-2-26853.

Jeffrey Trevathan
Office of General Counsel
Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board
eBids@highered.texas.gov

Please Note: Mr. Trevathan is the only THECB point of contact. Contact or attempted contact with other THECB employees, including Commissioners and their staff, may result in a Respondent's immediate disqualification.

All THECB responses must be in writing to be binding. Any information THECB deems to be important and of general interest or which modifies requirements of the RFO shall be provided in the form of an addendum to the RFO on the ESBD and THECB's website.

10. Proposal Format and Content

10.1 RFO Attachments

This RFO also includes the following attachments:

Attachment A: Department of Information Resources (DIR) Shared Technology Services Policy Document

Attachment B: Execution of Proposal (Required), including the following:

1. Respondent Information
2. Texas Family Code § 231.006(c)
3. Texas Government Code § 669.003
4. Preferences
5. Exceptions to Terms and Conditions
6. Response Acknowledgment
7. Signature

Attachment C: HUB Subcontracting Plan (Required)

Attachment D: Copy of Anticipated Contract (for reference only)

Attachment E: Conflict of Interest Disclosure Statement (Required)

10.2 Organization of the Proposal for Submission

Proposals must be submitted to the Point of Contact by an authorized representative via email to eBids@highered.texas.gov and received by THECB prior to the deadline. The subject line of the email should be entitled "Proposal Submitted for RFO No. 781-2-26853, ERC-DDA Project." THECB recommends a limit of 75 MB for each attachment.

Proposals must include all required attachments and be in the format described herein. THECB will not accept attachments received after the proposal deadline. Failure to submit all required information shall make the Proposal nonresponsive and thus disqualified from consideration.

Respondents are solely responsible for thoroughly understanding this RFO and its attachments. Any questions concerning this RFO should be directed to the

Point of Contact by the Deadline for Submitting Questions identified in Section 9.2.

Respondents are cautioned to pay particular attention to the clarity and completeness of their Proposal. Respondents are solely responsible for their Proposal and all documentation submitted. Respondent's Proposal shall be as precise, accurate, and succinct as possible. Respondent shall provide detailed descriptions of how it will fulfill each requirement. The clarity and completeness of a Proposal may be considered by THECB evaluators.

No mailed, hand-delivered, or faxed Proposals will be accepted.

The Proposal shall include:

Respondent shall submit a total of three (3) files:

1. Excel document;
2. Portable Document File (PDF) No. 1; and
3. PDF No. 2.

The following are part of the THECB's administrative review. Failure to submit any items or submitting incomplete items will result in deeming the Proposal unresponsive.

- The Excel document shall contain the pricing as described in Section 5.1.
- PDF No. 1 shall contain responses to the following in this order:
 1. Minimum Eligibility Requirements under Section 2, including its subsections.
 2. Response to Scope of Work under Section 3, including its subsections.
 3. A minimum of three (3) references, including contact information. THECB prefers references from clients for whom Respondent has performed similar work, including other state agencies. Do not use THECB or any individuals employed by THECB as a reference.
- PDF No. 2 shall contain the following **four** items:
 1. Transmittal Letter

Respondent shall provide a Transmittal Letter addressed to the Point of Contact that identifies the person or entity submitting the Proposal

and includes a commitment by that person or entity to provide the services required by THECB through this RFO.

The Transmittal Letter must be signed by a person legally authorized to bind Respondent. The letter must specifically identify that the Proposal is in reference to the Education Research Center Data and Dissemination Assistance (ERC-DDA) Project.

The Transmittal Letter must include the following language:

- *“The enclosed Proposal is binding and valid at the discretion of THECB.”*
- *“The enclosed Proposal is good for ninety (90) days.”*
- Terms and Conditions Acceptance/Exceptions
 - *“Full acceptance of the terms and conditions described in this Statement of Work” or*
 - *Provide a list of exceptions to the terms and conditions in Respondent’s Transmittal Letter. Any exceptions to this RFO must be specifically noted in the letter. If Respondent takes any exceptions to any provision of this RFO, these exceptions must be specifically and clearly identified by section and Respondent’s proposed alternative must also be provided. Please note as an agency of the state of Texas, THECB is bound to comply with all applicable state and federal procurement and contract laws. Exceptions to required terms and conditions may disqualify the Proposal from further consideration. Respondent cannot take a “blanket exception” to the entire RFO. If any Respondent takes a “blanket exception” to this entire RFO or does not provide proposed alternative language, the Proposal may be disqualified from further consideration.*

Any terms and conditions attached to a Proposal will not be considered unless specifically referred to in this RFO and Respondent’s attachment of such terms and conditions to a Proposal may disqualify the Proposal.

2. Execution of Proposal (Attachment B) – All information on Attachment A is required to be completed
3. HUB Subcontracting Plan (Attachment C) – All information on Attachment B is required to be completed. The form can also be found [here](#).

In compliance with Texas Government Code §§ 2161.001-.253, it is THECB's policy to promote and encourage contract and subcontract opportunities for state of Texas certified Historically Underutilized Businesses in all contracts. Eligible Respondents are encouraged to become state of Texas HUB certified. Applications may be found at: <https://comptroller.texas.gov/purchasing/vendor/hub/>.

Definitions for state of Texas HUB certifiable businesses can be found in the Texas Administrative Code. [34 Tex. Admin. Code § 20.282](#).

A HUB Subcontracting Plan Form must be filled out and returned with the Proposal to be considered responsive. If the Proposal does not include a HUB Subcontracting Plan, it shall be rejected as a material failure to comply with advertised specifications. Please see the attached HUB Subcontracting Plan for further instructions which requires vendors to identify the specific areas intended for subcontracting.

Search the state of Texas HUB Database for HUB vendors by the NIGP class and item [here](#). Additional minority and women owned business association resources are available for subcontracting notices are available on the Texas Comptroller's [website](#). Additional information and training regarding how to complete a HUB Subcontracting Plan can be found [here](#).

Please note you must allow HUBs at least seven (7) working days to respond to your notice prior to your bid response submission to THECB

4. Conflict of Interest Disclosure Statement (Attachment E)

The Conflict of Interest Disclosure Statement is required and must be attested to by an unsworn declaration. Respondents shall be neutral and impartial, shall not advocate specific positions to THECB. Respondents shall identify the extent, nature, and length of these

relationships or engagements. Entities having a conflict of interest, as determined by THECB, will not be eligible for vendor selection.

If Respondent does not have any known or potential conflicts of interest, the Proposal must include such a statement.

Failure to provide either a signed statement on potential conflicts of interest or a signed statement that no potential conflicts exist shall automatically disqualify Respondent.

The Conflict of Interest Disclosure Statement shall be signed by the highest-ranking officer of Respondent's entity having responsibility for vetting corporate conflicts of interest, e.g., a corporate Executive Vice President rather than the head of an operating or regional unit of the firm.

THECB will determine whether a conflict of interest or the perception of a conflict of interest exists from the perspective of a reasonable person uninvolved in the matters covered by any resulting contract. THECB is the sole arbiter of whether a conflict or the appearance of a conflict of interest exists.

THECB encourages Respondents to provide complete disclosure of matters that might be considered a conflict of interest. Completeness of disclosure may be a factor in evaluating Proposals.

Each Respondent must also address how it intends to ensure that no interest arising or potentially arising as a result of its activities or those of its parent, affiliate, or other related entity shall conflict with Respondent's duty should it be selected to provide these services.

THECB may not enter into an agreement with a person it has employed within the past twelve (12) months. Persons who have been employed by THECB or by another state agency in Texas more than twelve (12) months but fewer than twenty-four (24) months ago shall disclose in the Proposal the nature of previous employment with the state agency and the date the employment ended.

NOTE: THECB, as a state agency, is prevented by the Texas Constitution from indemnifying a Respondent. Respondent is discouraged from including a term in its Proposal that requires THECB to indemnify it. Such a term may result in the Proposal being deemed nonresponsive.

Respondents are strongly encouraged to submit written questions during the inquiry period regarding any terms and conditions of this RFO.

The Proposal shall include all information required in this RFO. Respondent is solely responsible for thoroughly understanding the RFO and its attachments. Questions should be directed to the Point of Contact by the Deadline for Submitting Questions. Respondent is cautioned to pay particular attention to the clarity and completeness of its Proposal. Respondent is solely responsible for its Proposal and all documentation submitted.

10.3 Additional Considerations

All written deliverables must be phrased in terms and language that can be easily understood by non-technical personnel (e.g., laypersons without subject matter expertise).

All items of this agreement shall be done in accordance with Awarded Respondent Responsibilities.

THECB may request oral presentations.

11. Proposal Evaluation Criteria

THECB will review and score responsive Proposals according to the Evaluation Criteria outlined in the table below. The relative weight of each criterion is indicated in the right-hand column.

Evaluation Criteria Table	
Criterion	Weight
Experience and Qualifications:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrated ability to complete a project of comparable scope and complexity. 	10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrated experience and expertise in the areas of data documentation, research dissemination, and associated information architecture including capability to perform the required services. 	10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> References describe Respondent’s past work pertinent to this RFO that includes strengths in hosted platform configuration and deployment, enterprise integration, stakeholder engagement, and end-user training. 	5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence provided in organizational chart and project staff resumes demonstrates that the Company’s proposed project team has the experience, skills, and ability to complete Section 3. Scope of Work. 	5

Evaluation Criteria Table	
Criterion	Weight
Strength of Project Work Plan:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposal addresses Scope of Work in Section 3., including all subsections. 	25
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposal provides a detailed description of the “single portal” solution for ERC researchers and stakeholders for browsing, searching, and accessing resources published to the Data Dictionary and Research Repository platform(s) with related Community Features. 	15
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposal demonstrates processes for completing Sections 3-4, Deliverables and Reports related to project management, communication, information architecture, stakeholder engagement, content gathering, requirements refinement, platform development, training, documentation, system integration, next steps, etc. 	10
Timelines:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project plan provides acceptable timelines for implementation. 	10
Price:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost estimate aligns with expected deliverables and presents best value to the state. 	10
Total	100

THECB will consider best value for the state, as directed by Texas Government Code § 2157.003, when selecting a Respondent, in addition to the Evaluation Criteria above. THECB will be the sole judge of best value. Best Value criteria may include, but is not limited to:

- a) The Proposal that best meets the goals and objective as stated in this RFO;
- b) The Proposal that indicates Respondent’s ability to reliably perform the required tasks/deliverables described in this RFO;
- c) The Respondent’s ability to adhere to the schedule and delivery terms (if applicable);
- d) Respondent’s experience in providing services in this RFO;
- e) Past Vendor Performance: In accordance with Texas Government Code §§ 2155.074 and 2262.055, vendor performance may be used as a factor in the award (if applicable); and
- f) Other factors relevant to determining the best value for the state in context of this particular purchase (i.e., certifications/licensure, reference checks, pricing, etc.).

12. Additional Instructions

12.1 Accuracy of the Proposal

Respondent's Proposal shall be true and correct and shall contain no cause for claim of omission or error. Proposals may be withdrawn in writing at any time prior to the submittal deadline.

12.2 Cost of Submitting the Proposal

THECB will not reimburse Respondent for any cost related to its Proposal. Respondent is responsible for any expense related to the preparation and submission of its Proposal.

12.3 Public Information Act Disclosures

THECB is a government agency subject to the Texas Public Information Act (PIA), Texas Government Code §§ 552.001-.376. The Proposal and other information submitted to THECB by Respondent are subject to release as public information. The Proposal and other submitted information shall be presumed to be subject to disclosure unless a specific exception applies to disclosure under the PIA. **If it is necessary for Respondent to include proprietary or otherwise confidential information in its Proposal or other submitted information, Respondent must clearly label that proprietary or confidential information and identify the specific PIA exception that applies to disclosure. Merely making a blanket claim that the entire Proposal is protected from disclosure because it contains some proprietary information is not acceptable and shall make the entire Proposal subject to release under the PIA. In order to trigger the process of seeking an Attorney General Opinion on the release of proprietary or confidential information, the specific provisions of the Proposal that are considered by Respondent to be proprietary or confidential must be clearly labeled as described above.** Any information which is not clearly identified as proprietary or confidential shall be deemed to be subject to disclosure pursuant to the PIA. Respondent is required to make any information created or exchanged with the state pursuant to the solicitation or contract, and not otherwise excepted from disclosure under the PIA, available in a format that is accessible by the public at no additional charge to the state.

Respondent, by submitting a Proposal, shall thereby be irrevocably deemed to have fully indemnified and agreed to defend THECB from any claim of infringement in the intellectual rights of Respondent or any third party for any materials appearing in the Proposal.

12.4 Irrevocability of the Proposal

The Proposal is irrevocable for ninety (90) calendar days following the Proposal Opening Date and Time identified in this RFO. This period may be extended at THECB's request with Respondent's written agreement.

12.5 Conflicting RFO Language

If language contained in a particular section of the RFO is found to be in conflict with language in another section, the most stringent requirement(s) shall prevail.

Award Notice. If this RFO is awarded, THECB will post a Notice of Award on the Electronic State Business Daily (ESBD). However, there is no guarantee that an award, any contract, or purchase order will result from this RFO. **THECB will not respond to inquiries regarding procurement status.**