

Chancellor Ohio Board of Regents Request for Information (RFI)

The Chancellor of the Ohio Board of Regents (OBR) releases this Request for Information (RFI) for the purpose of collecting information on certain business processes to use in programmatic decision-making and to compile a list of qualified vendors potentially interested in providing their business services and products to OBR. As a result of the information collected through this RFI process, the agency will determine its business needs, and anticipates subsequently formulating and publishing a Request for Proposals (RFP), or similar document, for competitive procurement of vendor services to fulfill those needs. This RFP may be issued directly through OBR or through one of its technology programs, e.g. the Ohio Learning Network, or partner agencies, e.g. the eTech Ohio Commission.

OBR requests information from vendors who can provide OBR with a learning management system that includes an associated content repository together with related services. This software is needed in order to create the Distance Learning Clearinghouse (DLC), a platform through which distance education classes will be made available to K-12 students. If successful, the platform may also be made available for broader use in K-12 and for use by higher education institutions to support traditional classroom-based as well as online classes. Classes will be offered through the DLC by many educational organizations to students from multiple districts.

Should OBR advance to a formal competitive procurement following this RFI process, only vendors already providing such services on a national basis would be considered, so that only minimal start-up time following completion of the competitive procurement process would be needed before operations could begin. Therefore, OBR is particularly interested in receiving responses to this RFI from national vendors currently operating in this area, which have specific experience to share.

Background:

Revised Code section 3333.81 through 3333.89, passed by the Ohio General Assembly in 2008, directs that the chancellor establish a central clearinghouse for interactive distance learning courses and other distance learning courses delivered via a computer-based method offered by school districts, community schools, STEM schools, state institutions of higher education, private colleges and universities and other nonprofit and for-profit course providers for sharing with other school districts, community schools, STEM schools, state institutions of higher education, private colleges and universities and individuals.

The courses must be delivered in accordance with technical specifications approved by the chancellor and on a common statewide platform to be administered by the chancellor. Furthermore, one function of the clearinghouse must be an integrated searchable database of standards-based course content. The course management platform must also:

- **Facilitate the delivery of courses via computers from multiple source providers to multiple end users**
- **Track the progress of the end users**
- **Enable participating students' school district, community or STEM school to transmit a student's data verification code and name to the course provider**
- **Provide secure access to course content that will allow updates and changes as needed by the course provider.**

Fees will be charged for courses offered through the clearinghouse. A percentage of each fee may be retained by the chancellor to offset the cost of maintaining and operating the clearing house.

The above Background discussion is summary only. It is strongly suggested that you review the relevant sections of the Ohio Revised Code cited above and familiarize yourself with the statutory requirements of the clearinghouse project prior to developing your recommendations for this RFI.

Scope of Work:

OBR recognizes that the market for the learning management systems which could help OBR accomplish these goals is very dynamic. Vendors are offering new combinations of products and services which could meet OBR's needs. In addition, these offerings are accompanied by a growing variety of business models. This RFI is being issued to better understand the changing LMS industry and to identify vendors which can help OBR meet its legislative mandate and to understand the combination of products, services and pricing which could potentially be sought through an RFP or other procurement process.

Vendors are asked to share their vision and plans with OBR to determine the direction of this procurement process. Specifically, interested vendors will be asked to address the following topics:

Product Features

1. Learning Management System
What are the instructional features of the learning management system, including its ability to support online education in a K-12 setting, e.g. the ability to align content to standards, and its assessment capabilities? What distinguishes the product from the products of other vendors?
2. Student tracking and data exchange
How would the proposed platform make it possible to track student outcomes and the use of the system? The DLC will need to be able to exchange student data with other information systems, including both central OBR systems and those at school districts. Is the system able to exchange student data with other systems and, in particular, does it implement the Schools Interoperability Framework (SIF) standards for student data? How does the system protect student data?
3. Content and content management
How does the proposed product provide an integrated capability to manage course content as required by the Ohio Revised Code? What are the system's capabilities to import and export learning materials? Does it support relevant standards, e.g. SCORM or IMS? Does the vendor sell or have partnerships with other vendors who sell instructional content for use with the system?

Services

Initial use of the desired solution is expected to be limited. For this reason, and to ensure that the DLC can be implemented as quickly as possible, OBR anticipates needing the vendor to initially provide a hosted version of the software. Is a hosted version available? What other services are available from the vendor, including training and consulting services?

Business Model

How does the vendor charge for its products and services? What is the advantage of this structure to OBR? How will an increasing number of users affect OBR costs?

In all cases, vendors are expected to distinguish current from anticipated features of their products, and when features are not supported by the current product, vendors are also expected to provide a timeline for the availability of those features. Vendors are welcome to submit a proposal in partnership with other vendors. In the event of multiple submissions related to the same product, OBR may choose only one for further consideration.

Response Information:

Interested vendors should submit a letter of intent combined with copies (all submissions must be electronic) of current sales literature describing their products. The letter of intent should include the names of contacts of at least two educational institutions which are users of the vendors LMS and can serve as references.

Vendors must submit their letter of intent and product literature by December 29, 2008. Vendors should include "Distance Learning Clearinghouse RFI" in the subject line of their e-mail. Letters of intent and related material should be sent to Michael.Haudenschild@etech.ohio.gov.

Vendors will then be asked to provide OBR with a one-hour webinar through which they can respond to this RFI. The one-hour webinar will be an opportunity for the vendor to give a presentation that addresses the questions and needed features described above. The presentation should not exceed 40 minutes and allow for 20 minutes of interactive discussion with the review committee. Presentations should also be sent electronically to OBR in PowerPoint 2007 or Adobe Acrobat format. If needed, a follow up webinar or conference call may be arranged to continue these discussions. Initial webinars will be arranged with vendors for the week of January 19. The vendor will provide the platform for the webinar.

Materials received after the due date and time as stated above will not be included in any previous submissions, nor will they be considered. The chancellor may reject any response that is not in the required format, does not address all the requirements of this Request for Information, or that the chancellor/OBR believes not in its interest to consider. The chancellor may also cancel this RFI at any time. The chancellor also reserves the right to request clarification from vendors for any information provided by vendors or requested by the chancellor through this RFI.

ANTICIPATED RFI TIMETABLE

Activity	Date
RFI publication; Q&A period begins	December 15, 2008
Letter of Intent Due Date	December 29, 2008
Possible Webinars	January 19-23, 2009

The chancellor may reject any responses or unsolicited modifications that it receives after the deadline. A vendor mailing its response must allow for adequate mailing time to ensure its timely receipt.

REVIEW OF RFI RESPONSES

The chancellor has issued this RFI to determine the types of programs available to develop the clearinghouse, the availability of qualified, ready, and willing vendors, and to collect information on vendor practices so that the chancellor can make informed program decisions regarding the range of services and service delivery options available in order to build and manage the clearinghouse project. No procurement of any vendor services will occur via this RFI alone. Should the chancellor decide to implement programmatic directions for which work similar to that described in this RFI would be needed, a formal competitive procurement will be undertaken at that time.