

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

PROJECT NO. 06-22

Supply and Install Student Email System

Date: March 21, 2006

To: All Prospective Respondents

From: Houston Community College System, Procurement Operations

Subject: Informational Letter #1 – Request for Proposals (RFP) for Supply and Install Student Email System (Project No. 06-22).

The following written questions regarding subject RFP were received in the Purchasing Department prior to the deadline for submitting written inquiries of March 17, 2006 at 5:00 p.m.(local time):

Question #1:

In section 2.1.3, you state that the vendor must provide 10 higher education institutions that are using the email system that will be proposed. Is this a hard requirement, one that could result in a "no-bid" from the vendor?

HCCS Answer:

Section 2.1.3 states the vendor must provide a list of ten higher education institutions where the proposed system is being used as a student email system. These installations can be performed and/or supported by any vendor, not necessarily by your company. This information should be available to you from the system manufacturer. The purpose, as stated, is to assess the viability of using the system for the stated purpose - student email. If you cannot provide a list of ten, you should provide what you can. This will not eliminate any company from consideration.

Question #2:

In looking at the requirements it is stated that you would like the email system to be able to support up to 250,000 users with 50mb storage for each account as well as an option for 100mb. In our dealings with other universities, we have found that offering this email box size to be severe overkill. With your requirements, as written, it would take 6 to 12 terabytes of storage which will make the price of such system to increase drastically. As I said earlier, this is severe overkill, and will skew pricing severely. A recommended storage amount for your specific type of user would be around 5mb to 10mb.

HCCS Answer:

The storage and quota requirements within the RFP reflect HCCS Student Email System anticipated needs for the system. Although other institutions may use a 5-10MB quota, this is HCCS requirement at this time.

However, in order to make certain that the Committee reviews every reasonable alternative, vendors are asked to include a third option of a 25MB quota. However, the quoted storage system must be able to scale to support a 50MB quota for 250,000 users.

Vendor's are encouraged to use experiences with other higher education institutions to recommend an "overbooking" factor for storage, but this factor must be stated and explained.

Question #3:

Is this system going to be hosted at your site or would it be hosted offsite, and if it is being hosted onsite what is the specific Hardware that we are "plugging" into?

HCCS Answer:

Please refer to paragraphs 1.4.2 and 1.4.4 in Attachment 3 of the RFP. Vendor responses must propose a system to be installed in the HCCS data center (on site) and must include all hardware, software, etc. for a complete turnkey system. The vendor provided hardware will be installed by the vendor on the public segment of the HCCS network.

Question #4:

It is requested that options for email storage quota for each student be given in the following increments:

10mb
20mb
50mb
100mb

HCCS Answer:

Options have been requested for 25, 50, and 100MB. If the vendor's proposed system does not support one or more of these increments, the response must state that the increment is not supported and should include the closest increment supported. Also, if the vendor would like to propose additional options other than those requested, these will be considered only if the vendor's proposal also includes the requested options.

Question #5:

Please advise if we will be disqualified from the process by proposing a hosted e-mail solution.

HCCS Answer:

Yes. Section 1.4.4 of the RFP states that the system must be installed in the HCCS data center and that proposals for shared systems or ASP systems will not be accepted. This would include a hosted service.

Question #6:

You mention in section 4.4.1 of the RFP that the proposed software licenses must be for 125,000 email accounts however in the pricing document you ask for pricing for 50,000 student email accounts. Can you provide clarification on which number you expect to see in the RFP Response, please?

HCCS Answer:

The proposed software licenses must be for 125,000 accounts. The pricing document is in error. The vendor must make the correction in the response.

Question #7:

What is driving you to outline a less than 1 month production time-frame (project commences 05/26 goes into production 06/21). I suppose this includes the testing phase? Would/could this be extended?

HCCS Answer:

This will be negotiable. It is highly desirable for the system to be online and available for fall registration which starts in August. The implementation cycle includes the testing phase. A consideration for an extension will be one of a number of factors used to select a vendor and system.

Question #8:

Are you willing to utilize existing h/w and s/w rather than install all new h/w and s/w to save on project costs?

HCCS Answer:

HCCS has no hardware or software that is available and/or suitable for this project. The proposal must include all hardware, software, installation, support, maintenance services, etc. as specified in the RFP.

Question #9:

Was the installation of Mirapoint Message Server unsuccessful, in which case part of this project may involve fighting some fires?

HCCS Answer:

No. The installation was a success.

Question #10:

How many faculty and staff will you have? The RFP says you have 7,000 employees. Of which 800 are full time and 1,900 are part time. Who are the other 4,300 employees? Will the faculty and staff use POP (please state the total number of users)? If so, what are the expected peak hour POP logins? Will the faculty and staff use IMAP (please state the total number of users)? If so, what are the expected peak hour IMAP logins? Will the faculty and staff use webmail (please state the total number of users)? if so, what are the expected peak hour webmail logins? Will the faculty and staff use calendar (please state the total number of users)?

HCCS Answer:

Since the email system is for the use of HCCS students and not faculty and staff, these questions are not relevant to the responses to the RFP. The information regarding the number of employees was included in the RFP for overview purposes only.

Question #11:

What is the expected Webmail logins per hour for the student population? How will this number change as you scale up to 250,000 users? We can provide guidelines if necessary.

HCCS Answer:

The expected number of Webmail logins per hour is not known. The vendor should use statistical information from other installations to develop this number and provide the related assumptions in the response.

Question #12:

Paragraph 4.1.9, page 17- The implementation planned outlined is 4-5 weeks, with a go live date of June 21, 2006. This schedule appears too short for the complete implementation with the identity management function requested in 4.2 and the transition of email accounts from Mirapoint in 4.9. Based upon the initial assessment, complete implementation will take 8-12 weeks. Would a go live date in July or August 2006 be acceptable to HCCS?

HCCS Answer:

See answer to question #7. It is highly desirable for the system to be online and available for fall registration which starts in August. A consideration for an extension will be one of a number of factors used to select a vendor and system.

Question #13:

Since the product used to provide LDAP visibility into the Oracle database is provided by Oracle, would it be more applicable to ask that pricing be quoted by Oracle directly on this matter?

HCCS Answer:

It is expected that the selected vendor will provide all hardware and software for a complete (turnkey) solution. The intent is to have the selected vendor totally responsible for the installation and support of the total solution.

Question #14:

What SAN systems are currently in use and available by HCCS?

HCCS Answer:

HCCS currently uses a SUN SAN 6320, but this SAN is already allocated and can not be used by the student e-mail system. The vendor must provide additional storage for the student e-mail system.

Question #15:

HCCS currently serves 50,000 active students across 6 colleges. The RFP requests pricing for 125,000 students with a maximum of 250,000 students. Are the additional licenses intended as placeholders for "inactive" students, or is the active student population anticipated to grow to these new numbers over the next few years?

HCCS Answer:

An "active" student is a student who is attending classes during a semester. As a community college, students may attend in the fall semester and not attend the following spring. Since we will create an email account for a student when application is made admission and maintained for the purposes of communicating with students, over the course of time the number of accounts will grow to a level well above the number of active students.

Question #16:

What is the current student population for each college?

HCCS Answer:

Since the email system will be centrally installed and managed for all colleges including distance education, the student population for each college is not relevant to the response to the RFP.

Question #17:

What were the objectives and primary findings for the Mirapoint proof-of-concept?

HCCS Answer:

The objective of the proof-of-concept test is to demonstrate that a student email system is a useful tool for communicating with students that have applied for financial aid.

Although the testing is not complete, the results of the test have been positive.

Question #18:

May the proposed solution for account provisioning & authentication utilize ODBC access to the PeopleSoft Oracle database?

HCCS Answer:

Any secure access to the database is possible including ODBC. However, the proposed solution may include any provisioning and authentication process that can be automated and that is compatible with both the proposed system and the PeopleSoft Oracle database. It is the responsibility of the vendor to verify this compatibility and to certify that it will work.

Question #19:

If yes, is there a flag or "last modified" date in the User tables to indicate changes?

HCCS Answer:

No.

Question #20:

Are passwords stored in the Oracle database in an encrypted format, and if so what format or algorithm is used?

HCCS Answer:

Passwords within Oracle Database are encrypted. Encryption is Oracle proprietary and algorithm is not known.

Question #21:

You indicate that LDAP is not currently enabled; can this protocol be enabled to accommodate account provisioning and authentication? If yes, can you provide detail on what LDAP service is used by PeopleSoft?

HCCS Answer:

PeopleSoft currently does not use an LDAP service at HCCS. LDAP certified to work with PeopleSoft can be found on Oracle PeopleSoft website.

Question #22:

What is the data center environment where the servers will reside?

HCCS Answer:

The HCCS Data Center is a raised floor, temperature and humidity controlled environment that includes UPS and emergency generator systems for power.

Question #23:

How much rack space is available to house proposed equipment, and/or should racks be included in the specifications?

HCCS Answer:

The vendor's proposal must include racks to house the proposed equipment.

Question #24:

Can you clarify what is intended by a hard quota versus a soft quota limit for disk space?

HCCS Answer:

The intended use of a soft quota is to allow the student to not send any email once the quota has been reached. The student should receive some notice that the quota limit has been reached, but they can still receive email. The hard quota limit will not send nor receive any email once this limit is reached.

Question #25:

Can you expand on desired content filtering features?

HCCS Answer:

Content filtering would include the ability for the system administrator to apply settings and filters to block spam and undesired content. Since spam filtering is a challenge for any system administrator, the proposed solution should simplify this process for the administrator. It is not intended that the administrator will customize filtering for the individual accounts, but if the filtering capability allows the account user to mark certain types of emails as spam without affecting other users, this is acceptable. Also, since spammers constantly become more creative in bypassing spam filters, the proposed solution should be flexible enough to permit the administrator to make changes as required to block email that is considered spam or that contains undesired content.

Question #26:

The Mirapoint product appears to offer a combination of web-based (server-centric) content, plus POP and IMAP access. Accordingly, some legacy content will reside on each of the 30,000 student computers, with other information stored on the server. Is it the intent of this proposal to request that email from each student computer be migrated onto the selected vendor's system, or are you seeking migration only of data residing on the Mirapoint server?

HCCS Answer:

The accounts set up on the Mirapoint system use web mail only. Therefore, all content will reside on the server.

Question #27:

What format does Mirapoint use for storage of content, and/or what tools or toolkits are provided by Mirapoint to access this data?

HCCS Answer:

The format for storage on the Mirapoint system is not known at this time. For the purposes of the response, the vendor should use the experience of importing other email systems content into the proposed system in order to develop a cost and plan.

Question #28:

Does the PeopleSoft database record external e-mail addresses for each prospective student, such that notifications for new students may be distributed electronically?

HCCS Answer:

The PeopleSoft database contains a field that stores the email address for each student. This stored email account will be the HCCS provided email account. It is expected that once the student account is auto-provisioned or auto-deleted, the email system will pass this information to PeopleSoft so that this field can be updated. It is expected that this information will be presented to the student during the online application process. It is also expected that the vendor will utilize experience with other higher education institutions to propose a solution for notifying students of their new email account.

Question #29:

If not, would automated generation of a letter, to be printed and sent via standard mail, satisfy this requirement?

HCCS Answer:

No.

Question #30:

In section 4.4.1, “the proposed software licenses must be for 125,000 email accounts” and in section 4.9.1, “, it is estimated that there will be 30,000 student email accounts setup on the Mirapoint student email system”. These accounts need to migrate to new email system.

There are $125,000 - 30,000 = 95,000$ extra email accounts.

Email system license fee is based on how many user accounts.

Is it to the benefit of HCC to just license for 30,000 or little more than 30,000 for now and then pay addition fee for add on users?

HCCS Answer:

The proposal must include the cost of 125,000 email account licenses.

Question #31:

Can HCCS provide Small Business Vendor list to us so that we can contact and offer subcontract opportunity to them to meet “good faith” effort?

HCCS Answer:

HCCS Vendors can be viewed on line and searched by keywords by visiting HCCS website at www.hccs.edu (click on: Business & Community/Vendor Information/Approved Vendor List/Search Vendor List). Vendors may also contact the HCCS Economic Development Office Representative (Ms. Paralee Shivers) at 713-718-5158 for assistance.

Question #32:

Can HCCS waive the Hardware certification requirement?

HCCS Answer:

No. However, if the proposing vendor chooses to partner with another vendor who is certified on the proposed hardware or is the hardware manufacturer, this will be acceptable. The additional vendor must be listed as a subcontractor in the response. However, the proposing vendor remains responsible for the delivery of a complete, turnkey installation as specified in the RFP as well as the resolution of any situations that may arise due to problems with the vendor-provided hardware.

Question #33:

If we are a state certified HUB vendor and a small business, do we still need to look for Small Business sub contractor? How 25% Small Business Utilization goal calculated? If we are a Small Business and do this project all by ourselves, then we will have 100% utilization for small business.

HCCS Answer:

Yes. You will need to look for Small Business Subcontractors for 25% of the project value. HCCS Economic Development Office utilizes the size of a project, availability of small business subcontractors with the needed skills, length of the project and history of utilization with similar projects. Yes, if you are a Small Business then the 100% utilization is met.