



# UNIVERSITY OF BALTIMORE

## Office of Procurement and Materials Management

<b>Issued By:</b> University of Baltimore Department of Procurement 1420 North Charles Street Baltimore, MD 21201	<b>Simplified Procurement:</b> <b>UB-24-BB-2</b>  Date Issued: August 17, 2023
<b>Procurement Official</b> Blair Blankinship, C.P.M., Contract Specialist	Deadline for Questions: Close of Business on August 25, 2023
e-mail: <a href="mailto:bblankinship@ubalt.edu">bblankinship@ubalt.edu</a>	<b>Quote Due Date and Time:</b> <b>August 30, 2023 at 2:00 PM</b>
<b>Use this link to submit questions:</b> <a href="#">RFQ Questions</a>	<b>Period of Performance:</b> 12 month contract with <b>Four</b> optional 12 month renewal periods
<b>Use this link to submit your quote:</b> Price Quote <a href="#">Submission</a> .	<b>F.O.B. DESTINATION</b>
	<b>Payment Terms:</b> Net 30 days
	<b>Deliver To:</b> SEE BELOW

### Financial Aid Form Processing and Quality Control

The University of Baltimore (the “University” or “UBalt”) is seeking the service of a qualified independent contractor that will ensure the timely processing of *Free Applications for Federal Student Aid* (FAFSA) applications to determine financial aid eligibility so that students may know if they can attend UBalt. The FAFSA Application is the application for federal, state, and institutional aid to determine financial aid eligibility. The successful Contractor will also be engaged in consulting and possibly implementation to assist the University of Baltimore with the transition to *FAFSA Simplification Act Changes for Implementation in 2024-25*. Refer to the scope of work that is included with this Solicitation for further information.

#### 1. QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS PROCUREMENT

Any and all questions regarding this solicitation must be addressed to the Procurement Official identified on page one, or another designated Procurement Official. All questions are to be provided in writing via email. To maintain the integrity of the procurement, the person named above is to be the sole point of contact for this solicitation.

## 2. BACKGROUND

The University of Baltimore provides innovative education in law, business, public affairs and the applied arts and sciences to serve the needs of a diverse population. A public university, the University of Baltimore (UB) offers excellent teaching and a supportive community for undergraduate, graduate and professional students in an environment distinguished by academic research and public service. The University:

- makes excellence accessible to traditional and nontraditional students motivated by professional advancement and civic awareness
- establishes a foundation for lifelong learning, personal development and social responsibility
- combines theory and practice to create meaningful, real-world solutions to 21st-century urban challenges
- is an integral partner in the culture, commerce and future of Baltimore and the region.

The University of Baltimore is one of 12 institutions that encompass the University System of Maryland, the nation's 12th largest university system. The University of Baltimore's mission centers on providing innovative education in law, business and the applied liberal arts to serve the needs of a diverse population. UB's institutional vision is to become a living-learning laboratory at the center of the Baltimore renaissance.

The University is located in Baltimore's cultural district, centered on Mt. Royal Avenue and Maryland Avenue, just two miles north of Baltimore's Inner Harbor. The University has approximately 5,336 commuter students of whom 47% are full-time and 53% are part-time.

The average age of our students is 29.5. UB has approximately 689 employees of which 179 are faculty. UB is located at the center of the city's transportation hub, with easy access to the Light Rail, train station and bus routes. For more information about UB, visit [www.ubalt.edu/institutionalresearch](http://www.ubalt.edu/institutionalresearch).

### FAFSA Applications

For the 2022-2023 financial aid award cycle, **UBalt received 6,139 FAFSAs prospective and current students**. There was a total of 10,105 transactions connected to this number of FAFSAs. A total of 4,189 FAFSAs for admitted and enrolled students were loaded into the UBalt financial aid system. The average number of the FAFSA filers selected for federal verification for the last three years was 445. This number is expected to increase in the future as verification waivers during the recent pandemic expire.

## 3. SCHEDULE

The FAFSA Applications become available to potential students on October 1st of each year. Timely awarding and disbursement of aid is crucial in helping students know if they can attend UBalt. It is imperative that the verification review and process begin in the February prior to the start of the academic year.

The initial Term of the Contract is anticipated to begin on the date the contract is signed by UBalt or a later date as directed by the University, and run for 12 months thereafter. The University reserves the unilateral right to renew the contract, at its sole discretion, for up to a maximum of four (4) additional 12-month periods. The Company is to quote the unit pricing for each year (initial plus optional renewals).

#### 4. SCOPE OF WORK

4.1. The University of Baltimore (UB) is seeking the service of a qualified company to complete the verification process for students selected the Department of Education (USDE) after they submit their FAFSA Application. The FAFSA Application is the application for federal, state, and institutional aid to determine financial aid eligibility. The FAFSA Application is the application for federal, state, and institutional aid to determine financial aid eligibility and become available on October 1<sup>st</sup> each year. Timely awarding and disbursement of aid is crucial in helping students know if they can attend UB. It is imperative that verification review and process begin in the February prior to the start of the academic year. Timely awarding and disbursement of aid is crucial in helping students know if they can attend UB.

4.2. To support timely awarding and disbursement and to better meet the needs of students and prepare files for awarding in a timely and efficient manner, assistance is requested in collecting required documentation and reviewing that documentation against student submitted FAFSAs. Utilizing the services of an outside contractor will help even out the peaks and valleys of FAFSA submission and the overlap of award years without adding more full-time staff to accommodate verification. The selected contractor must be recognized by the US Department of Education (USDE) and undergo annual audits submitted and reviewed by the USDE.

4.3. The University of Baltimore reserves the right to engage the successful Contractor in its efforts to implement changes in process and procedure necessary for the transition to *FAFSA Simplification Act Changes for Implementation in 2024-25*. Work may include planning and implementation for changes to:

- Changes to the Need Analysis Formulas
- Changes to Allowances Against Income
- Changes to the Asset Contribution Components
- Changes to Dependency Status Definition
- Changes for Families with Multiple Students in College
- Changes to the Definition of Cost of Attendance
- Expansion of Pell Grant Eligibility
- Changes to the Income Protection Allowance
- Changes to Financial Aid Appeals
- and other program changes

For more information from the U.S. Department of Education regarding the “Simplification Act Changes” see - <https://fsapartners.ed.gov/knowledge-center/library/dear-colleague-letters/2023-08-04/fafsa-simplification-act-changes-implementation-2024-25>

4.4. The contractor shall furnish all services including, but not limited to, providing the necessary labor, materials, supervision, equipment, services, incidentals, and related items necessary to provide complete remote file review and verification for student financial aid.

## **5. GENERAL REQUIREMENTS - VENDOR CAPABILITIES and DELIVERABLES**

The successful vendor must be capable of, and must provide the following deliverables:

- 5.1. Create and utilize a system for clearly communicating verification needs to students and parents, including responding to phone calls and questions submitted from students, parents, and college staff.
- 5.2. Facilitate remote financial aid services and complete verification of Institutional Student Information Records (ISIR's), including reviewing all verification documents.
- 5.3. The selected vendor will complete the FAFSA/financial aid verification on behalf of the UBalt Office of Financial Aid. The vendor will update status, change student, or parent information, etc., in the UBalt financial aid system (PeopleSoft) through remote access. As required, the vendor will follow up with the student and/or parent to facilitate corrections. UBalt is responsible for transmitting updates to the U. S. Department of Education.
- 5.4. The vendor is expected to provide updates in real time (daily) and provide a weekly summary report to UBalt OFA.
- 5.5. Provide direct and continuous monitoring and supervision of file reviewers/verification specialists.
- 5.6. Be cognizant of USDE Title IV "red flags" that could indicate fraud/abuse and escalate those files to the System and Compliance Lead at UB.
- 5.7. Utilize secure web-based forms to collect, review, and preserve student /parent information.
- 5.8. Utilize a process management system that provides a seamless flow of information between the contractor and UB Office of Financial Aid staff from which both entities will be able to track and share files and comments on student files to provide a seamless experience for students.
- 5.9. Use UB identified portal to integrate with the University's financial aid system.
- 5.10. Provide real time access to information by UB staff that details the status.
- 5.11. Work with UB to develop and maintain a current knowledge base of file review/verification information that will be available to the successful contractor and to UB Office of Financial Aid staff for ready reference.
- 5.12. Collect and analyze data concerning trends and patterns or inquiries to identify potential problem areas; keep UB apprised, using a schedule that is mutually agreeable to UB and the contractor of process that will promote continuous improvement.
- 5.13. Provide data reporting options to support data-driven decision-making by UB.
- 5.14. Provide the ability to review required documentation and process income changes on FAFSAs using professional judgement.

## **6. SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS - CAPABILITIES**

For the 2022-2023 financial aid award cycle, UBalt received 6,139 FAFSAs prospective and current students. There was a total of 10,105 transactions connected to this number of FAFSAs. A total of 4,189 FAFSAs for admitted and enrolled students were loaded into the UBalt financial aid system. The average number of the FAFSA filers selected for federal verification for the last three years was 445. This number is expected to increase in the future as verification waivers during the recent pandemic expire.

Quantitative quality assurance measures: Successful contractor must accurately (no more than 2% error rate in USDE Title IV audit) complete review of each file submitted to the successful contractor within three (3) business days. The successful contractor either requests additional required documentation from the student/family, submits a correction to the FAFSA processor, or returns the file to UB as correct and ready for packaging within those three (3) days.

6.1. Establish a baseline and a plan to measure and improve output metrics. The plan should include methodology for tracking and reporting that is mutually agreeable to UB and the contractor.

6.2. Contractor must accommodate seasonal variances in file review and verification. All files must be processed to the extent possible for each file within three business days.

6.3. Contractor must demonstrate and provide documentation upon request of in-depth knowledge and experience working with clients that use the PeopleSoft Student Information System and ImageNow.

6.4. Contractor must provide documentation of the capacity and experience to provide successful remote financial aid file review and verification services.

6.5. The successful contractor shall provide documentation of the in-depth knowledge and experience working with clients that use the PeopleSoft Student Information System and ImageNow.

## **7. CONTRACTOR'S EXPERIENCE**

The contractor must:

7.1. Have five years' experience and contractor employees shall have 3 years' experience relevant to the Title IV financial aid verification process.

7.2. Vendor will undergo an annual USDE Title IV audit. The completed annual audit will be submitted to UB Office of Financial Aid. UB will provide the audit to external entities (State of Maryland, USDE, etc.), upon request, to demonstrate UBalt financial aid processing is in compliance with USDE or State of Maryland processing guidelines and meets audit requirements.

### **Contractor's Personnel**

The contractor must:

7.3. Provide a dedicated staff of financial aid file reviewers to assist in working escalated files in a timely manner.

7.4. Provide dedicated staff with customer service experience to handle student/parent inquiries regarding verification and requested documents and to address questions from staff members at those UB.

7.5. All file review and verification operations must be within the continental United State and must have extensive knowledge of higher education within the United States and specifically, USDE Title IV financial aid regulations and procedures.

## **8. TRAINING**

Contractor must provide extensive training for employees. NASFAA certified staff are strongly preferred. Training for staff members in the following areas at the successful contractor 's expense:

- All aspects of financial aid file review, verification and C-codes;
- Understanding and use of pertinent US Department of Education/Federal Student Aid systems
- Required understanding of tax returns and tax filing requirements;
- PeopleSoft Student Information System (SIS) and ImageNow when access is provided;
- The Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA);
- Pertinent sections of the Higher Education Act (HEA), as amended;
- Understanding complex student eligibility scenarios and reasons why a particular student may or may not be eligible for Title IV financial aid;

UB will provide information and assistance in initial training on the university's policies and procedures and updated information regarding the same as it occurs. Continuing staff members will regularly receive updates and training on updated USDE regulations.

Individuals newly hired by the contract must be thoroughly trained in all the above areas by the contractor before assuming responsibility for file review, verification, and C-code processes.

## **9. REPORTING AND DELIVERY REQUIREMENTS - DELIVERABLES**

The contractor must issue a progress report of the Financial Aid student as it relates to the statement of needs of this RFQ **weekly** to the Systems and Compliance Lead and Director of Financial Aid and, as requested, by his/her direct supervisor. The report or reports will include the following:

- 9.1. Verification of Institutional Student Information Report (ISIR)
- 9.2. All verification progress status
- 9.3. Documents required for clearing C-codes
- 9.4. Documents for clearing conflicting information
- 9.5. Any documents necessary to prepare and finalize a file. In addition, the reports will include (when applicable):
- 9.6. Adding additional items required for file completion
- 9.7. Corrections to the USDE
- 9.8. Returning files as ready to package for financial aid awarding
- 9.9. The contractor shall develop and follow clear guidelines for escalation of files when necessary and appropriate.

## 10. **CONTRACT DOCUMENTS**

- 10.1. The selected firm will be required to sign a UBalt Contract and Contract Affidavit prior to commencement of the services. (See attached Agreement.) By submitting a response to this solicitation, the Company is affirming that they will execute this contract in substantially the same form. Due to the fast-track nature of this procurement, UBalt does not intend to substantially negotiate any of the terms and conditions, nor does it intend to accept any requested Company terms and conditions.
- 10.2. UBalt will own all deliverables resulting from this engagement and must be able to use the deliverables as UBalt deems in its best interest. The Company will retain ownership of its intellectual property as well as of any “know-how” that is developed during the engagement.
- 10.3. UBalt will not pay in advance for any services.
- 10.4. To the extent Contractor generates or maintains educational records related to participating students, Contractor agrees to comply with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (“FERPA”) to the same extent as such laws and regulations apply to the University and shall limit access to only those employees or agents with a need to know.

The Contract resulting from this solicitation, pursuant to FERPA, the University may designate Contractor as a school official with a legitimate educational interest in the educational records of the participating students to the extent that access to the University’s records is required by Contractor to carry out its duties under the Agreement. Pursuant to FERPA, Contractor agrees that it shall not disclose any student educational records, either generated and maintained by it or provided to it by the University, without the prior written consent of the student.

10.5 To the extent Contractor generates or maintains educational records related to participating students, Contractor agrees to comply with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (“FERPA”) to the same extent as such laws and regulations apply to the University and shall limit access to only those employees or agents with a need to know. For the purposes of this Agreement, pursuant to FERPA, the University hereby designates Contractor as a school official with a legitimate educational interest in the educational records of the participating students to the extent that access to the University’s records is required by Contractor to carry out its duties under the Agreement. Pursuant to FERPA, Contractor agrees that it shall not disclose any student educational records, either generated and maintained by it or provided to it by the University, without the prior written consent of the student.

Further, Contractor agrees to perform its obligations under this Agreement in accordance with the University’s privacy governance program. The Contractor agrees to take no action that obstructs or hinders University from implementing its privacy governance program. If, in the course of performance of this Agreement, University shares any personally identifiable, confidential, or sensitive information with Contractor, Contractor shall cooperate with University’s implementation of its privacy governance program.

## 11. COMPANY’S RESPONSE REQUIREMENTS

**Companies shall submit the following information.**

11.1. The name, address, telephone number, e-mail address and fax number of the Company and the name, title, address, telephone number including extension number, and e-mail address of the Company’s Representative for the Proposal.

11.2. **Evidence of qualifications** to perform the required analysis and **History of Providing Similar Services:** Provide a narrative that provides detailed, but concise, information on the Company’s history of providing similar services for other educational institutions. Such history is to include the number of years providing these services, as well as the number of Company employees that perform financial aid reviews.

11.3. All personnel assigned to UBalt’s contract must have a minimum of three years relevant experience).

11.4. Submit the most recent annual **USDE Title IV audit** of the Company with this narrative.

11.5. **Current clients:** Company name, address, telephone number and contact name of **three (3) current major clients of the Company**, including the length of the relationship with each client and detailed description of the FAFSA processing program services the company provides/provided to the client.

**Description of Company’s staff** that worked for the client should also be provided (Lead Contract Manager is sufficient with the number of staff processors assigned to the contract.) UBalt reserves the

right to contact these clients, or any other source available to it, including past performance with UBalt and/or the University System of Maryland, as a reference for the Company.

**11.6. Approach to Contract/Staffing Plan and Capabilities of Team Lead and Reviewers:**

Provide information regarding the approach that the company will take to provide the services. What tools are used by the Company for tracking reviews, inquiries, customer support, quality assurance/auditing, resources; and the geographical location of the personnel. (See the scope of work for requirements, including training, of the personnel.)

**11.7. Provide an anticipated staffing plan** as to how the company proposes to staff the UBalt contract with highly capable individuals who will manage the team as well as provide the financial aid reviews.

In addition, the Proposal should include, but is not limited to:

- a) How the company handles the ebb and flow of the work load;
- b) the training provided to the company's staff;
- c) the geographical location of the Company's management and reviewers that will be assigned to UBalt,
- d) the typical schedule of assigned staff; and
- e) the escalation path that is available to UBalt for any problems/issues that may arise.

Included in this information should be a brief, but informative, **resume of the person who will be designated as UBalt's team lead**, as well as the anticipated number of dedicated staff of reviewers.

**11.8. Assumptions:** Provide any assumptions on which your firm's proposal is based.

**12. EVALUATION OF OFFERS**

UBalt will review the responses received and will select the most advantageous response considering technical and price factors. Technical merit will be judge on the quality of the Work Plan provided by each offeror, offeror qualifications (including items 5 – 9 on pages 3 through 6), references, and other provisions not specifically requested that are included in the offeror's quote that the University determines to be of value. The award of the Contract may be awarded to a Company who is evaluated to be more technically qualified, that is, the award may not go to the lowest price received.

*Continued on page 10*

**13. CONTRACT PRICE**

The Contractor shall furnish all services including, but not limited to, providing the necessary labor, materials, supervision, equipment, services, incidentals, and related items necessary to provide complete remote file review and verification for student financial aid.

Company will provide a firm fixed cost and hourly rates for remote processing services using the estimated quantities provided in this Solicitation. The quantities are estimates to be used for cost evaluation purposes only. The University makes no guarantee of the maximum or the minimum number of hours to be used per year under any resulting contract. Unit Prices quoted will be used as the basis of price in any contract that may be awarded.

Provide fixed unit prices for the each term of the Contract based on the estimate quantities provided. The hourly rates are to be fully loaded hourly rates for processing services. There are no reimbursables under the resulting contract.

The University shall not pay any expenses incurred in the preparation or submission of any quotation. The University reserves the right to accept any or all items of any quotation, in whole or in part and to reject any or all quotations. The University will not accept alternate solutions or additional pricing.

Item No.	Description	Quantity	Unit	Unit Price	Total Price
1. a.	Remote verification of applications for students selected by the Department of Education (USDE) after students submit their FAFSA Application.  Initial Contract Term - commencing upon award of the contract and running for 12 months thereafter.	600	hours		
1.b.	Progress Report of the Financial Aid Student (items 5.1 – 5.14 on page 4 and items 9.1. - 9.9. - page 7)	1	lot		
2.	Time and materials rate for contractor consultation and assistance with planning and implementation of the transition to FAFSA Simplification Act Changes for Implementation in 2024-25.  *The estimate of 400 hours is for financial offer evaluation purposes only. The University does not guarantee any specific number of hours for the needed work. The actual number of hours will be determined after scope of work planning has been completed with the cooperation of the successful contractor. Number of actual hours is subject to change.	400*	hours		
3.	Optional First Renewal Term Remote verification of applications for students selected by USDE.	600	hours		

3.b.	Progress Report of the Financial Aid Student (items 5.1 – 5.14 on page 4 and items 9.1. - 9.9. - page 7)	1	lot		
4.	Optional Second Renewal Term Remote verification of applications for students selected by USDE.	600	hours		
4.b.	Progress Report of the Financial Aid Student (items 5.1 – 5.14 on page 4 and items 9.1. - 9.9. page 7)	1	lot		
5.	Optional Third Renewal Term Remote verification of applications for students selected by USDE.	600	hours		
5.b.	Progress Report of the Financial Aid Student (items 5.1 – 5.14 on page 4 and items 9.1. - 9.9. page 7)	1	lot		
6.	Optional Fourth Renewal Term Remote verification of applications for students selected by USDE.	600	hours		
6.b.	Progress Report of the Financial Aid Student (items 5.1 – 5.14 on page 4 and items 9.1. - 9.9. page 7)	1	lot		
<b>TOTAL DOLLAR AMOUNT</b> for solicitation evaluation					

Name and address of firm:	Name of Person Authorized to Bind the Firm:
FEIN:	Signature of Person Authorized to Bind the Firm:
Phone Number:	email:
Name and address of Project Manager that would be assigned to the University:	
Phone Number:	email: