



RICE

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**Request for Proposal #: 2020-11-001 Emergency Call  
Center Services**

Date of Issue: November 18, 2020

Proposal Submission Deadline: December 1, 2020  
At 5:00 PM Central Time



# RICE UNIVERSITY

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

### **2.0 PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND**

### **3.0 GENERAL INFORMATION**

- 3.1 REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL DOCUMENT
- 3.2 NOTICE REGARDING RFP TERMS AND CONDITIONS
- 3.3 RFP SCHEDULE
- 3.4 PROPOSAL QUESTIONS
- 3.5 PROPOSAL SUBMITTAL
- 3.6 KEY CONTACTS

### **4.0 SCOPE OF WORK**

- 4.1 ABOUT THE PROGRAM
- 4.2 PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

### **5.0 REQUIREMENTS**

- 5.1 PROPOSAL CONTENTS
- 5.2 CONTRACT FORM AND TERM

### **6.0 METHOD OF AWARD AND EVALUATION**

- 6.1 METHOD OF AWARD
- 6.2 EVALUATION CRITERIA

### **7.0 GENERAL TERMS AND CONDITIONS**

### **8.0 EXHIBIT A - INSURANCE REQUIREMENTS**



# RICE UNIVERSITY

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Rice University requests and welcomes competitive proposals from experienced and qualified organizations to establish a contract through competitive negotiations to provide Emergency Call Center Services. The university desires to partner with a company to provide telephone and e-mail support services to handle calls and emails related to COVID-19 or any emergency incidents affecting the campus community. This RFP includes a description of the scope of work, proposal requirements, and instructions for submitting your proposal. This project may be paid for with Federal funds, which may include Coronavirus Aid Relief & Economic Security Act (CARES Act) funds.

RFP documents are found in Rice University's Solicitation Opportunities website at <https://buy.rice.edu/solicitation-opportunities>. Respondents must periodically review the site for potential amendments, regular updates to the RFP timeline, and other related information.

Proposals shall be submitted in accordance with the terms and conditions of this RFP and any addenda issued hereto.

## **2.0 PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND**

William Marsh Rice University, commonly known as Rice University, is a private research university in Houston, Texas. The university is situated on a 300-acre campus near the Houston Museum District and is adjacent to the Texas Medical Center. The university enrolls 3,800+ undergraduate students, 2,800+ graduate students (~6,500 total student population), ~ 2,900 faculty and staff for a total campus population of ~10,000 (including campus visitors/contractors).

## **3.0 GENERAL INFORMATION**

### **3.1 REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL DOCUMENT**

The RFP is comprised of the base RFP document, any attachments, and any addenda released before the Contract award. All attachments and addenda released for this RFP in advance of any Contract award are incorporated herein by reference.

RFP documents are found in Rice University's Solicitation Opportunities website at <https://buy.rice.edu/solicitation-opportunities>. Respondents must periodically review the site for potential amendments, regular updates to the RFP timeline, and other related information.

### **3.2 NOTICE REGARDING RFP TERMS AND CONDITIONS**

It shall be the Respondent's responsibility to read the instructions, Rice University's terms and conditions, all relevant exhibits and attachments, and any other components made a part of this RFP, and comply with all requirements and specifications herein. Respondents also are responsible for obtaining and complying with all addenda and other changes that may be issued in connection with this RFP.

If Respondents have questions, issues, or exceptions regarding any term, condition, or other sections within this RFP, those must be submitted as questions in accordance with the instructions in Section 3.4 PROPOSAL QUESTIONS. If Rice University determines that any changes will be made as a result of the questions asked, then such decisions will be communicated in the form of an RFP



addendum. Rice University may also elect to leave open the possibility for later negotiation and amendment of specific provisions of the Contract that have been addressed during the question and answer period. Other than through this process, Rice University rejects and will not be required to evaluate or consider any additional or modified terms and conditions submitted with the Respondents' proposal. It will apply to any language appearing in or attached to the document as part of the Respondents' proposal that implies to vary any terms and conditions or Respondents' instructions herein or to render the proposal non-binding or subject to further negotiation. The Respondents' proposal shall constitute a firm offer. **The Respondent agrees that any additional or modified terms and conditions, whether submitted purposely or inadvertently, shall have no force or effect and will be disregarded by execution and delivery of this RFP Response. Noncompliance with, or any attempt to alter or delete, this paragraph shall constitute sufficient grounds to deem Respondents' proposal as nonresponsive.**

### 3.3 RFP SCHEDULE

The table below shows the intended schedule for this RFP. Rice University will make every effort to adhere to this schedule.

Event	Date and Time (Central Time)
Date of Notice (RFP Issued)	November 18, 2020
Closing Date for Receipt of Written Questions	November 19, 2020 at 5:00 PM
Issue Addendum (Response to Submitted Questions)	November 20, 2020
Closing Date for Receipt of Proposals	<b>December 1, 2020 at 5:00 PM</b>
Optional Finalists Demos/Presentations (Tentative)	December 2, 2020
Anticipated Award Notice (Tentative)	December 4, 2020
Contract Execution	December 7, 2020

Rice University expects awarded Provider Organizations to begin services on or around December 7, 2020.

### 3.4 PROPOSAL QUESTIONS

Upon reviewing the RFP documents, Respondents may have questions to clarify or interpret the RFP to submit the best proposal possible. Respondents shall submit any such questions by the above due date. Written questions shall be emailed to [abj2@rice.edu](mailto:abj2@rice.edu) by the date and time specified above. Respondents should enter "RFP #2020-11-001: Questions" as the subject for the email. Questions submittals should include a reference to the applicable RFP section. The university's response to questions received before the submission deadline, and any additional terms deemed necessary by the university will be posted in the form of an addendum. No information, instruction, or advice provided orally or informally by any Rice University personnel, whether made in response to a question or otherwise in connection with this RFP, shall be considered authoritative or binding.

### 3.5 PROPOSAL SUBMITTAL

Proposals will be received until 3:00 PM, December 1, 2020. All proposals shall be electronically submitted via email and adequately identified with the RFP# 2020-11-001 and Emergency Call Center for Rice University. Proposals shall be emailed to [abj2@rice.edu](mailto:abj2@rice.edu). It is the Respondents' responsibility to ensure the proposal is received on time. Rice University reserves the right to accept or reject all or



# RICE UNIVERSITY

any part of any proposal, waive informalities, and award the contract to serve the university's best interest.

## **3.6 KEY CONTACTS**

All questions concerning this RFP must be submitted in writing via email to Adriana Jimenez, Buyer, at [abj2@rice.edu](mailto:abj2@rice.edu).

## **4.0 SCOPE OF WORK**

### **4.1 ABOUT THE PROGRAM**

As described in the Introduction, Purpose and Background sections, the purpose of this RFP is to secure the services of one or more qualified organization(s) who will maintain and operate a toll-free call center to respond to calls and emails from the Rice University population in the event of a crisis. Because the call center will provide services in response to crises, the number of times and duration of times that the call center will be operationalized cannot be determined. The experience of the current emergency call center indicates a monthly volume that is unpredictable and based on the unique characteristics of emergencies. The call volume is influenced by the estimated number of persons potentially exposed or impacted, the geographical regions of the state involved, and the actual or perceived threat of disease by the general public.

The number of callers for each emergency cannot be guaranteed by the university.

### **4.2 PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS**

Rice University requires at least the following services and the successful respondent must meet the following standards:

#### **Deliverable 1: Accessibility and Staffing**

- a) The successful respondent(s) will operate the call center on a continual basis, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, for the duration of the crisis or event, with capable staff available to answer calls and respond to emails directly during this entire time period. Answering machines cannot be utilized.
- b) The successful respondent(s) must have the capability to ramp-up call center operation to fully operational status within four hours after being notified by the university and provided the university's "Question and Answer" script and data collection form for use by call center operators. This means that the contractor must have the facility, technology, and staffing in place to start taking calls within four hours of notification. The university will attempt to provide as much notice as possible as the university prepares to respond to an event.
- c) The successful respondent(s) must have sufficient staff to adjust the number of staff at the call center to accommodate all call volume fluctuations, including the potential to accommodate call volume for the entire state, and coordinate with other call centers and services, as needed.
- d) The call center must be accessible to all persons throughout Rice University and have the capability to answer calls from any affiliates.
- e) The successful respondent(s) must have the capability to receive calls forwarded from other toll-free numbers that may be directed to the call center.
- f) The successful respondent(s) will be required to hire staff who have strong communication and interpersonal skills. Operators should be culturally competent and capable of interviewing callers of diverse backgrounds, including older adults, people with disabilities, and racial and



# RICE UNIVERSITY

ethnic minorities. Operators should have the ability to handle inquiries and requests from callers in a courteous and professional manner, including calls received in crisis situations and/or from irate callers.

- g) The successful respondent(s) must make available, at a minimum, sufficient numbers of English and Spanish speaking staff during all hours of call center operation. The contractor(s) must provide language translation services in multiple languages on an as needed basis to accommodate non-English speaking callers through either multilingual staff or via a “foreign language line”, such as AT&T Language Line Services. If a telephone translation service is used, the “connect time” to reach a translator should not exceed 1 minute.
- h) The successful respondent(s) must utilize a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) or telephone typewriter (TTY) service to ensure that the hearing impaired are offered levels of service similar to that received by telephone users.

## **Deliverable 2: Integrated Voice Response Systems**

- a) The successful respondent(s) may use an integrated voice response system (IVR) to provide the initial message to callers. The contractor may propose using IVR in other ways that have been shown to be effective within the scope of work of the RFP.
- b) The successful respondent(s) may include the ability for callers to select an educational message or answer to frequently asked questions through an automated menu, if requested by the university.
- c) The successful respondent(s) must make all automated messaging available in English and Spanish, and add other languages as requested by the university.
- d) The successful respondent(s) must always provide the option of a live person response for all callers during the period of operation.

## **Deliverable 3: Response Times**

- a) The successful respondent(s) must answer all calls within the first three rings, either by a live operator or by the integrated voice response.
- b) The average wait or hold time for a live operator must be less than 1minute.
- c) The successful respondent(s) must indicate their anticipated incoming average blockage rate (the percent of calls that receive a busy signal).
- d) The successful respondent(s) must indicate their anticipated average abandoned call rate.

## **Deliverable 4: Caller Assistance/Information Dissemination**

The successful respondent(s) is responsible for providing up-to-date information and referrals appropriate to caller needs, including callers in crisis. The contractor will use “Question and Answer” scripts provided by the university to facilitate input and retrieval of information by operators and to ensure the timely delivery of accurate information and referrals. More specifically, the contractor’s information dissemination responsibilities include, but are not limited to, providing the following information to callers:

- a) Determine caller needs and circumstances.
- b) Provide accurate information based on “Question and Answer” scripts in response to caller questions.
- c) Provide in-service training, on an as needed basis, to keep staff up-to-date on “Question and Answer” script content. Scripts may undergo rapid revisions due to the changing nature



# RICE UNIVERSITY

of the public health emergency, and the contractor must ensure that staff are provided and are using the most current script provided by the university

- d) Link callers with an appropriate health service provider, if necessary and directed by the university.
- e) Calls requiring transfer to a university designated number must be accomplished via the attended transfer mode.
- f) Transfers to voice mail are allowed as negotiated by the university.

## **Deliverable 5: Management Reports**

- a) The successful respondent(s) must submit management reports as required by the university for its use in the review, management and analysis of the call center. To support these reports, the successful respondent(s) must collect, at a minimum, the following information on each call:
  - Date and time
  - Disposition (abandoned, queued, connected, completed)
  - Time to connect
  - Duration
  - For answered calls: language
  - For answered calls; devices for individuals with disabilities
  - For IVR systems: tallies of all menu selections
- b) Summary reports must also be submitted and include peak hours for calls, average length of calls, use of translation services for languages other than English and devices for individuals with disabilities, call abandonment rates, and any other challenges and/or issues related to staffing, maintenance and operational issues and their disposition. The information submitted must include any data used to determine billing charges.
- c) The contractor must have quality control measures in place to assure accuracy and timeliness of all reports. Reports shall be provided by the contractor(s) in paper format and in an electronic format as determined by the university.

## **Deliverable 6: Quality Assurance and Improvement**

The contractor shall have a written internal quality assurance (QA) plan for the monitoring and improving of call center services, which includes training and supervision of staff, ongoing performance assessment of the quality of information provided to callers, and follow-up on identified issues. Any alteration of the frequency or strategy for monitoring call center services shall only be made with prior approval of the university. This includes, but is not limited to:

- a) Evaluation of call center operations including monitoring of response time, abandonment rate, staff effectiveness, and use of management reports to improve call center performance.
- b) Provision of feedback to the university regarding questions from callers that the “Question and Answer” script does not answer.
- c) The capability to gather and report on customer complaints, compliments and other service related comments/suggestions and protocol to respond to customer complaints.
- d) A process for rapid and thorough follow-up of any complaints.
- e) Performance assessment of call center services, staff training, and reporting to the university.
- f) Provision of advice and recommendation to the university regarding call center operations and management. Such responsibility shall include, but not be limited to, keeping the university informed in a timely manner concerning such matters as new advances and technological





# RICE UNIVERSITY

improvements in telecommunications, innovation and any potential issues affecting the call center. The university is not under any obligation to act on such advice or recommendations.

## **5.0 REQUIREMENTS**

### **5.1 PROPOSAL CONTENTS**

Proposals should provide a concise but complete description of the respondent's ability to meet the requirements of the RFP. Proposals should be identified with the name of the respondent and RFP # 2020-11-001. The requirements for a complete proposal to be considered are:

Proposals must be organized into the following sections:

- A. Respondent Organization
- B. Program Narrative
- C. Cost Proposal & Billing

- A. Respondent Organization – up to two (2) pages

Provide information summarizing:

- Structure of Provider Organization (e.g., nonprofit, for-profit)
- Employer Identification Number (EIN)
- Services currently offered by Respondent and population(s) served
- Experience providing services similar to or relevant to those in this Program
- Names and contact information for two (2) references familiar with the work of the organization

If the applicant plans for subcontractor(s) to provide some of the services, this information must be provided for all subcontractors.

- B. Program Narrative – up to six (6) pages

A narrative description of how the respondent will manage all aspects of the emergency call center described in Section 4.0 SCOPE OF WORK. Respondents may provide additional information or recommendations relevant for consideration in the university's determination of award of the contract(s). The Program Narrative should be organized using the same sections in this RFP.

- C. Cost Proposal & Billing

Cost Proposal

Note: All costs are included in the fees for services proposed, and there will be no additional expenses billed to Rice University for any reason.

Proposal price shall constitute the following costs for project implementation (to include planning and service design, training, etc.), ongoing call center support (per call, per minute, etc.) and all other costs such as software licensing, ADA/Spanish speaking services, etc. Sufficient additional detail should be provided for the evaluation committee to clearly identify sources of all costs and





# RICE UNIVERSITY

expenses. Any costs and expenses not clearly identified as part of the proposal will not be considered at a later date. Respondents should provide complete costing for Emergency Call Center Services. Optional costs should be clearly identified as such separately.

All costs must be inclusive of all activities necessary to implement the call center as described in this RFP. The university cannot guarantee the number of calls that will be received by the contractor resulting from this RFP. Based on history and experience, a base level of 600 to 8,000 calls per event should be assumed, and each bidder's cost proposal should be based on this level. There may be circumstances when the number of completed calls received per event exceeds the base level due to the nature of the event.

The charges must be based on the actual time required for operators to respond to telephone inquiries using prepared "Question and Answer" scripts provided by the university.

No distinction in price per call or related services will be made for the time of the day, day of the week, or if calls/services are received/performed on a holiday.

Any other expenses related to having an adequate number of lines or equipment, installations or modifications to enable the contractor to develop and maintain the call center is the responsibility of the contractor and must be built into the cost proposal.

A rate increase request will be considered at each contract renewal date. No increase will exceed 3% without prior approval from the university. Any other price increases for years two through five, due to change in scope of work, will require a waiver from the university.

Respondents must be able to provide evidence of their financial ability to perform the terms and conditions of the contract. Each respondent must include independently audited financial statements (not annual reports) for the last three years of operations. If a respondent is not required to have audits performed, a statement to that effect must be included with the cost proposal. If a respondent is not required to have independent audits performed, other evidence of financial ability to perform this project must be included. In addition, information as described above must be submitted for major subcontractors. If the respondent proposes to subcontract any portion of the work required under the contract and the subcontractor will be paid more than \$100,000, the respondent must include the same financial information for each proposed subcontractor as is required in this section for the respondent.

Describe billing system(s).

The payment terms for a purchase order are Net 30 days from receipt of an invoice. Payment terms can be negotiated if the respondent offers discount for early payment.

The successful Respondent shall not invoice for any amounts not explicitly allowed for in this RFP.

The university reserves the right to change requirements at any time during the process provided the changes are justified and that modifications would not materially benefit or disadvantage a respondent. Any modifications and/or amendments to the RFP will be made prior to receipt of



# RICE UNIVERSITY

proposals and all potential respondents made aware of the changes. Additionally, the modifications and/or amendments will be posted on the university's website.

## **5.2 CONTRACT FORM AND TERM**

The preferred form of the contract between Rice University and the successful Respondent is the Rice Professional Services Agreement (copy attached). The university seeks to award contracts for call center services on a "per event" basis.

The contract's initial term is for the scope of the project but may have an extended term for one year with three one-year optional renewals as agreed upon by Rice University and successful Respondent.

Submission of proposals indicates acceptance of all conditions contained in this RFP.

## **6.0 METHOD OF AWARD AND EVALUATION**

### **6.1 METHOD OF AWARD**

All qualified proposals will be evaluated, and award(s) will be made to the Respondent(s) meeting the RFP requirements, and best fits the needs of the university. Rice University reserves the right to finalize a contract with one or more firms based on all factors involved in the written qualification submittal without further discussion or interviews. Proposals will generally be evaluated according to completeness, content, and experience with similar projects, the Respondent and its staff's ability, and cost. Respondents are cautioned that this is a request for offers, not an offer or request to contract, and the university reserves the unqualified right to reject any and all offers at any time if such rejection is deemed to be in the best interest of the university.

### **6.2 EVALUATION CRITERIA**

Following the deadline for submittals, a selection committee will review the submitted proposals. The selection committee will review, analyze, and rank all submittals based on their response to the information requested. The selection process will include the following criteria in the evaluation of proposals. These criteria are not necessarily listed in order of importance.

- Proposed Cost
- Experience and qualification of the firm
- Understanding of the proposed project plan
- Overall proposal and completeness

## **7.0 GENERAL TERMS AND CONDITIONS**

1. **READ, REVIEW AND COMPLY:** It shall be the Respondent's responsibility to read this entire document, review all enclosures and attachments, and any addenda, and comply with all requirements specified herein, regardless of whether appearing in these Instructions to Respondents or elsewhere in this RFP document.
2. **LATE PROPOSALS:** Late proposals, regardless of cause, may not be considered, and can be automatically disqualified from further consideration. It shall be the Respondent's sole responsibility to ensure the timely submission of proposals.
3. **HISTORICALLY UNDERUTILIZED BUSINESS:** Rice University is committed to retaining Vendors from diverse backgrounds. It invites and encourages participation in the



# RICE UNIVERSITY

procurement process by businesses owned by minorities, women, disabled, disabled business enterprises, and non-profit work centers for the blind and severely disabled. In particular, Rice University encourages participation by Vendors certified by the State Office of Historically Underutilized Businesses, as well as the use of HUB-certified vendors as subcontractors.

4. **CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION:** To the extent permitted by applicable statutes and rules, Rice University will maintain as confidential trade secrets in its proposal that the Vendor does not wish disclosed. As a condition to confidential treatment, each page containing trade secret information shall be identified in boldface at the top and bottom as "CONFIDENTIAL" by the Respondent, with specific trade secret information enclosed in boxes, marked in distinctive color or by similar indication. Cost information shall not be deemed confidential under any circumstances. Any material labeled as confidential constitutes a representation by the Respondent that it has made a reasonable effort in good faith to determine that such material is, in fact, a trade secret. Respondents are urged and cautioned to limit the marking of information as a trade secret or as confidential as possible. If legal action is brought to require the disclosure of any material so marked as confidential, the university will notify Respondent of such action if feasible to allow Respondent to defend the confidential status of its information.
5. **MISCELLANEOUS:** Any gender-specific pronouns used herein, whether masculine or feminine, shall be read and construed as gender-neutral. The singular of any word or phrase shall be read to include the plural and vice versa.
6. **INFORMAL COMMENTS:** Rice University shall not be bound by informal explanations, instructions, or information given at any time by anyone on behalf of the university during the competitive process or after award.
7. **COST FOR PROPOSAL PREPARATION:** Any costs incurred by Respondents in preparing or submitting offers are the Respondents' sole responsibility; Rice University will not reimburse any Respondent for any costs incurred or associated with the preparation of proposals.
8. **SITUS AND GOVERNING LAWS:** This Contract is made under and shall be governed and construed in accordance with the laws of the State of Texas, without regard to its conflict of laws rules, and within which State all matters, whether sounding in Contract or tort or otherwise, relating to its validity, construction, interpretation, and enforcement shall be determined.
9. **PAYMENT TERMS:** If a payment schedule is not part of The Contract then payment terms will be Net 30 days after receipt of a correct invoice or acceptance of goods or services, whichever is later. Unless the respondent offers discount terms for early payment and agreed by the university.
10. **NON-DISCRIMINATION:** The Respondents will take necessary action to comply with all Federal and State requirements concerning fair employment and employment of people with disabilities, and concerning the treatment of all employees without regard to discrimination on the basis of any prohibited grounds as defined by Federal and State law.
11. **ADVERTISING:** Respondents agree not to use the existence of The Contract or the name of Rice University as part of any commercial advertising or marketing of products or Services. A Vendor may inquire whether the university is willing to act as a reference by providing factual information directly to other prospective customers.
12. **INSURANCE: COVERAGE -** During the term of the Contract, the Successful Respondent, at its sole cost and expense, will be required to submit a Certificate of Insurance to execute a



# RICE UNIVERSITY

contract as required in Exhibit A. Note the insurance coverages required in Exhibit A will be included in the final service agreement.

13. **GENERAL INDEMNITY:** Successful Respondent shall indemnify, hold harmless, protect and defend Rice and its trustees, officers, employees and representatives (the “Indemnified Parties”) for, from and against any and all demands, claims, suits, damages, losses, liabilities, costs and expenses, including, but not limited to, court costs and attorneys’ fees (the “Indemnified Matters”), of any nature whatsoever (including, but not limited to, damage to or loss of property, bodily injury or death), directly or indirectly arising out of or in connection with the performance of Consultant’s obligations under the Agreement.
14. **CONFIDENTIALITY:** Any Rice University information, data, instruments, documents, studies or reports given to or prepared or assembled by or provided to the Respondent under The Contract shall be kept as confidential, used only for the purpose(s) required to perform The Contract and not divulged or made available to any individual or organization without the prior written approval by Rice University.
15. **COMPLIANCE WITH LAWS:** Respondents shall comply with all laws, ordinances, codes, rules, regulations, and licensing requirements that are applicable to the conduct of its business and its performance in accordance with The Contract, including those of Federal, State, and local agencies having jurisdiction and/or authority.
16. **AMENDMENTS:** This Contract may be amended only by a written amendment duly executed by Rice University and the Successful Respondent.
17. **FORCE MAJEURE:** Neither party shall be deemed to be in default of its obligations hereunder if and so long as it is prevented from performing such obligations as a result of events beyond its reasonable control, including without limitation, fire, power failures, any act of war, hostile foreign action, nuclear explosion, riot, strikes or failures or refusals to perform under subcontracts, civil insurrection, earthquake, hurricane, tornado, or other catastrophic natural event or act of God.