

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS – N93061C

FOR

Association of Universities for Research in Astronomy, Inc.  
(AURA)

“Business Systems Technology Assessment”

PROPOSALS MUST BE RECEIVED BY

June 29, 2018; 3:00 PM MST

Prepared by:

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May 31, 2018

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## I. OVERVIEW

AURA seeks the services of a consultant(s) ("Consultant") to lead the development of a five-year strategic technology roadmap and tactical implementation plan to set the priorities and guide the investment in our business systems used in partnership with our NSF-funded Centers.

A successful engagement will answer the following questions:

1. What are the right 2023 goals to meet internal operating requirements and external partner goals?
2. From our current starting point, what is the right software licensing and development strategy to achieve our 2023 goals?
3. What is the preliminary operating plan required to hit our 2023 business systems goals (milestones, costs, etc.)?

The initial term of the agreement is expected to begin on or before July 16, 2018 and will be completed by September 1, 2018. The agreement will be renewable at AURA's discretion, during which the Consultant would provide consulting services related to the project on an as-needed basis.

## II. BACKGROUND

AURA's mission is to promote excellence in astronomical research by providing access to information about the universe from state-of-the-art facilities, surveys, and archives. Operations are primarily funded by grants and contracts from the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

AURA's current business systems are based on USL Financials (finance) and UltiPro (HRIS), augmented with significant in-house development to meet specific internal partner requirements.

AURA operates in a multi-entity environment, segregating the accounting for each of its Centers and Programs. Systems must effectively support the compliance requirements as listed in the Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards (2 CFR 200), which governs Federally-funded organizations. Users are located in the United States and internationally (primarily Arizona, Hawaii, Colorado, Washington D.C. and Chile) and require support for local language and currency. There are approximately 800 Users of AURA's financial systems.

## AURA Business Systems 2018 Operating Priorities

1. Maintain and enhance the IT infrastructure to support the operations
  - Maintain and upgrade hardware and software to ensure scalability to meet future needs.
  - Develop a strategy for integration of personally owned devices to provide secure and effective access to enterprise data and services.
  - Develop a cloud computing strategy based on benefits, return on investment, security, and data privacy risks.
2. Advance business processes and operational efficiencies through effective implementation of information technology.
  - Provide ongoing support for existing administrative processes and business systems.
  - Streamline workflow and automate business processes to improve business efficiency and reduce the use of paper.
  - Enhance interfaces between administrative systems to optimize efficiency and ensure the integrity of shared data.
  - Provide access to data and analytical tools to support administrative decision making and compliance
  - Evaluate and implement innovative technologies to improve operational efficiency.
  - Ensure excellent service to enable the effective use of technology, resources, and systems by users.
    - Identify and implement ways to further strengthen helpdesk operations.
    - Develop and enhance System User Guides and training for staff.
3. Ensure a strong IT workforce capable of achieving the information technology goals of the organization.
  - Provide technical and leadership professional development opportunities for IT employees.
  - Provide flexibility in scheduling and projects to allow staff time to work with innovative technologies.

### III. WORK SCOPE

In partnership with the AURA team, the Consultant will build out a strategic roadmap and tactical implementation plan that addresses overall goals as well as process-specific requirements. Core processes include, but are not limited to: General Ledger, Procurement, Timecards, Payroll, Expense Reimbursement, Payables, Reporting, Budgeting, Export/Import Control, Property Control, and Logistics.

Our team will be made available to the consultant for primary interviews in support of assessment and recommendations, including team members in Central Administrative Services (CAS), AURA corporate, and Center staff at AURA's Tucson office.

### IV. OUTPUT

A successfully completed engagement will include the following:

- A qualitative assessment of current AURA business systems against 2023 strategic objectives.
- An overview of current and emerging technology marketplace trends that should inform our overall roadmap (e.g., BaaS), including those related to purchased services, infrastructure and service methodology.
- A framework for making “build vs. buy” and “current platform vs. new platform” decisions, which we will use to describe any primary or alternative 2023 strategy tactical recommendations.
- A tactical plan which specifically addresses both technology and process improvement objectives.
- Cost estimates and go/no-go risk assessment for development, implementation and ongoing support for any primary and alternative recommendations.
- Communication documents (e.g. PowerPoint, supporting data spreadsheets) to support internal consensus building beyond our team and partner communication.

The chosen Consultant will be required to meet with AURA at its offices in Tucson and Washington DC between three and five times during the term of the agreement.

## V. REQUIRED PROPOSAL CONTENTS

Each response to the RFP should address both Engagement Approach and Engagement Cost.

### A. Engagement Approach:

1. **Cover Page:** Include the project title (“Business System Technology Assessment”), primary contact name, mailing address, email address, and telephone number.
2. **Detailed Approach:** A thorough description of the methodologies that will be utilized, and a project timeline map tasks and deliverables with required staffing/hours.
3. **Background on the Consultant, including the following:**
  - a. The individual or firm’s recent experience in strategic, financial and technical analysis of multiplatform business systems leading to detailed executive level recommendations;
  - b. Experience and skills of designated staff with regard to the following qualifications:
    - i. Applicable professional background, including significant experience as a consultant to the non-profit and government-funded sectors;
    - ii. Experience in advising technology clients regarding significant capital expenditures;
    - iii. Understanding of and experience assessing financial planning for capital expenditures;
  - c. Examples of no more than three projects similar to the one described in this RFP, which applicant has completed during the past five years; and
  - d. References from the project examples provided, including telephone and email contact information.

## B. Engagement Cost

Consultant must provide:

1. A breakdown of the hours for each staff member assigned to each task, with their hourly rates, and the hourly rates of staff during the renewal term ;
2. Identification of any task to be subcontracted, showing number of subcontractor hours and their hourly rates; and
3. Expenses including travel costs. All travel costs will be subject to AURA's approval and in accordance with AURA's Expense Guidelines found in the CAS Travel Manual.  
[http://au.acas.aura-astronomy.org/sites/default/files/AURA%20CAS%20Travel%20Manual%20-%20Final%20Edited%20Version%20-%20March%202017\\_1.pdf](http://au.acas.aura-astronomy.org/sites/default/files/AURA%20CAS%20Travel%20Manual%20-%20Final%20Edited%20Version%20-%20March%202017_1.pdf).

## VI. EVALUATION CRITERIA

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following dimensions.

1. Approach – The quality of the Consultant's proposed plan, including demonstrated understanding of the problem, methodologies to be utilized, likelihood of achieving project goals, division of the problem into appropriate tasks, and the identification of hours and staff allocated to each task.
2. Skills and Experience – Consultant's prior experience relevant to the proposed scope of work as evidenced by the examples of similar work; project staff experience and/or education with current systems and regulatory regimes relevant to the proposed scope of work, as evidenced by brief resumes of proposed staff members; and feedback from client references indicating Consultant is likely to achieve project goals.
3. Cost – Total project cost

## VII. PROPOSAL SUBMISSION

Proposals are due **June 29, 2018**, at 3pm MST. Please include the words “Business Systems Technology Assessment” in the subject line of the emails submitting both technical and cost proposals. AURA will acknowledge by email the receipt of each on time proposal that it receives.

Proposal materials should be submitted as PDFs, either directly attached to the submission email or available through a link to Dropbox.

Submit proposals and any samples of prior work by email (as attachments in PDF format) to:

Sheri Abney  
Contract Administrator  
sabney@aura-astronomy.org  
Phone: 520-318-8103

All questions must be submitted in writing to Sheri Abney at the email address above no later than **June 15, 2018**. Clarification or direction by other persons at AURA is not permitted during the RFP process. The questions and AURA’s responses will be posted on AURA’s Website without attribution.

AURA may request the top scoring applicants to present their proposals to AURA via videoconference. AURA will contact the selected applicants to schedule a time for the presentations.

Below is the anticipated timetable:

ACTIVITY	DATE
All questions submitted	<b>June 15, 2018</b>
Proposal Submissions Due, 3 pm .MST	<b>June 29, 2018</b>
Proposal Review and Selection	<b>July 10, 2018</b>
Contact Drafting and Execution	<b>July 13, 2018</b>

AURA has established a Web page to display AURA bid opportunities. The link to the webpage is: <http://auracas.aura-astronomy.org/?q=node/103>

The AURA/CAS Bid Opportunities Web page will display all pending RFB, RFPs, etc., issued by AURA/CAS as well as any amendments issued to such RFB/RFP’s. It shall be the Bidder’s obligation to check the AURA/CAS Bid Opportunities Web page to view and obtain copies of amendments and announcements related to the RFP they seek to bid on.

A sample services contract is available on the website.

## VIII. CONDITIONS OF AGREEMENT

### A. Submissions

Proposals submitted in response to this RFP by a Consultant shall be valid for at least 90 days following the closing date of the RFP.

Proposals shall be prepared simply and economically, providing a straightforward, concise description of the Consultant's proposals to meet the requirements of this RFP.

Neither multiple nor alternate proposals will be accepted. A Consultant should give specific attention to the clear identification of those portions of its proposal that it considers confidential, proprietary commercial information, or trade secrets.

The selected Consultant shall be responsible for all products and services required by this RFP. Subcontractors must be identified and a complete description of their role relative to the proposals must be included in the Consultant's proposals.

By submitting an offer in response to this RFP, a Consultant, if selected for award, shall be deemed to have accepted the terms of this RFP. Any exceptions to this RFP must be clearly identified in the proposal. A proposal that takes exception to these terms may be rejected.

As part of the RFP review process, AURA may share materials, data, other information and analyses (collectively, "Information") with Consultants. As a condition of receiving such Information, Consultants responding to this RFP shall be deemed to agree to protect, preserve and maintain all such Information on a strictly confidential basis, and to promptly return to AURA upon its request all tangible copies of such Information in your possession.

AURA is not responsible for loss or damage to material submitted with or in support of this RFP. Any submission to AURA shall become the property of AURA (not including any intellectual property rights contained in such submission), and AURA is not required to return any submitted materials to any Consultant. AURA is not responsible for any violation of copyright, trademark, patent, trade secret, or other rights that may result from disclosure made by response to this RFP.

Solicitation by AURA of proposals does not constitute an agreement by AURA to extend funding to any party for the project under consideration. AURA may, in its sole discretion, elect not to pursue this project in any manner.

By submitting a proposal, each Consultant grants to AURA the right to duplicate, use, disclose, and distribute all materials submitted for purposes of evaluation,

review, and research. In addition, each Consultant guarantees that the Consultant has final and complete rights to all information and materials included in the proposal. Each Consultant also guarantees that all such materials are not defamatory and do not infringe upon or violate the privacy rights, copyrights, or other proprietary rights of any third party.

AURA will not be responsible for any costs incurred by a Consultant in preparing and submitting a proposal, or in performing any other activities relative to this solicitation.

#### B. Terms of Agreement

If a proposal in response to this RFP is selected for funding, the successful Consultant(s) will be required to sign a binding agreement. Until both parties have signed an agreement, no express or implied commitment has been made to provide financial support.

Consultants are not authorized to commence work until the agreement is fully executed. If Consultants opt to commence work, they do so at their own risk. No oral or written statement other than the signed, written agreement will govern or modify the relationship.

As a condition of agreement, the successful Consultant(s) must guarantee that, among other things, any work they undertake on behalf of AURA is not defamatory and will not violate or infringe upon the privacy rights, copyrights, or other proprietary rights of any third party. Consultants must also agree to indemnify AURA against any loss resulting from breach of any of the guarantees contained in the agreement.

Those receiving funds from AURA must be able to comply with a number of requirements that will be included in the operative agreement. These requirements include, but are not limited to:

- (1) The Consultant will demonstrate adequate financial support to complete the work that has been contracted and to deliver reports and/or other intellectual property created pursuant to the Agreement;
- (2) The Consultant will maintain, for three years following receipt of relevant funds, all financial records to the project, which shall be accessible to AURA and to the National Science Foundation or other representatives for examination and audit purposes. (Consultants will additionally ensure that any subcontractors or consultants under the agreement shall also maintain such records for the period specified and under the same terms);

- (3) The Consultant will maintain, for three years after approval of a final financial report, a complete file of all subcontracts and other agreements, licenses, clearances, and other documents related to the work undertaken, copies of which shall be made available to AURA on request;
- (4) The Consultant will comply with equal employment opportunity and nondiscrimination laws and policies;
- (5) The Consultant will be required to provide documentation as to actual costs, and provide supporting details demonstrating that all costs are reasonable, necessary, and allocable to the requirements and objectives of the work undertaken;
- (6) All research and materials created, developed, compiled or produced pursuant to or as a result of this project (including but not limited to all reports) will be considered ordered and commissioned by AURA as works made for hire under the copyright laws, and made in the course of services rendered. If, for any reason, the proposed research and materials to be provided are not considered works made for hire under the copyright laws, then the Consultant will be required to assign all right, title and interest in and to such research and materials to AURA. Consultants further agree that neither they, nor any of their subcontractors, will have any copyrights or other intellectual property rights whatsoever in any research and/or materials created, developed, compiled or produced by them or by any subcontractor, or by any third party participating in the preparation of research or materials for this project;
- (7) The agreement will be governed as construed in accordance with the laws of the Arizona without regard to its conflict of law provisions;
- (8) No funds provided by AURA will be used (i) for any activity designed to influence legislation or appropriations pending before the United States Congress or any state legislature or (ii) to conduct any reception or provide any other entertainment for any officer or employee of the Federal Government or any state or local government; and
- (9) Consultants will be required to indemnify and hold AURA harmless from and against all claims, damages, liabilities, costs and expenses (including legal fees) arising out of or related to (i) any alleged or actual breach of any representation or warranty in the operative agreement; (ii) any other default by such Consultant of any term or provision of the operative agreement; or (iii) Consultant's performance under the project.

- (10) The principal source of AURA funds is appropriations made by the U.S. Congress to NSF. In the event reductions occur in the amount of such appropriations that materially affect the ability of AURA to meet its obligations, then AURA and Consultant, at the option of AURA, agree to enter into good faith negotiations to modify the agreement.

Other material terms and provisions will be set forth in the documents provided to the Consultant that successfully completes the selection process.