
Notice of Intent to Certify Sole Source

To: Interested Parties
From: David C. Johnson
CC: ITS Project Number 47915
Date: November 28, 2023
Re: Sole Source Certification Number 4574 to provide upgrades, training, maintenance, and support for the Aware case management system for the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS)
Contact Name: Matthew Livingston
Contact Phone Number: 601-432-8244
Contact E-mail Address: matthew.livingston@its.ms.gov

Sole Source Certification Award Details

Regarding Information Technology Services (ITS) Sole Source Certification Number 4574 for the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS), please be advised that ITS intends to award Alliance Enterprises, Inc. as the sole source provider of upgrades, training, maintenance, and support for the Aware case management system through December 31, 2026, in an amount not to exceed \$1,857,331.00. Please be advised that ITS will determine if additional training, upgrades, maintenance, support, or services are within scope during the certification period and may increase the spending authority accordingly. Should Alliance Enterprises, Inc. change their name during this certification period, then ITS will determine if a recertification is necessary. For an explanation regarding Mississippi state law, policy and procedures for sole source procurements, refer to Attachment B: Sole Source Procurement Overview.

Sole Source Criteria

1. The product or services being purchased must perform a function for which no other product or source of services exist:

The proprietary Aware Software has been in production in the State since 2000 and is referred to as AACE (Automated Accessible Casework Environment), MDRS's branded version of the Aware Vocational Rehabilitation Case Management System. AACE is the agency's main case management system used by Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind, Office of Special Disability Services, Assisted Technology, Ability Works, and the Addie McBryde Rehabilitation Center to manage MDRS's client information and produce reports for management and Federal/State requirements. Alliance Enterprises, Inc. is the only vendor who can make modifications to the Aware software. Aware is in alignment with federal reporting

requirements mandated by the Rehabilitation Services Administration. MDRS's partnership with Alliance ensures that the necessary frameworks are in place, and all federal reports are seamlessly integrated into the system. This not only expedites compliance with regulatory standards but also minimizes the risk of errors and delays in meeting crucial reporting deadlines. With the 20 plus years of customization embedded within this software, Aware provides adaption through their customization of their product. MDRS is requesting several upgrades to the AACE system that only Alliance Enterprises, Inc. can make. These upgrades include the Aware Vendor Portal for securely accessing payment authorizations, Power BI libraries for specific views and reporting from the Aware database, and the QA module allowing for case, fiscal, and vendor reviews for Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies.

2. The purchaser must be able to show specific business objectives that can be met only through the unique product or services:

AACE is used for managing information about MDRS's clients to determine them eligible for the MDRS programs. It produces reports for Management and Federal/State requirements that allows MDRS to be in compliance with regulatory standards while minimizing the risk of delays with reporting deadlines that are mandated by the Rehabilitation Services Administration. As part of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), MDRS has integrated the AACE system to the Common Intake and Reports system establish by NSPARC. The other partners included are the Common Intake system are the Mississippi Community College Board, Mississippi Department of Human Service, Employment Security Commission, and local work force partners. MDRS has various other interfaces into the AACE system to reduce redundancy.

MDRS needs the ability for vendors to securely access real-time authorization information and to communicate directly with the agency regarding authorizations and payments. The Vendor Portal will allow vendors to review authorizations, request payments, upload invoices, and retrieve payment statuses. MDRS has set up a dashboard to see statistical numbers for each program daily; however, this dashboard does not integrate with any of the current systems, making it difficult for the database developers to produce the reports as required due to the reports being snapshots. Power BI will allow integration to SharePoint for an immersive experience to allow for more accessibility. MDRS is in need to simplify the process of conducting performance reviews, and MDRS administrators need to review and evaluate case records, financial records, and vendor performance. The QA module will facilitate case, fiscal, and vendor reviews for VR agencies.

3. The product or services must be available only from the manufacturer and not through resellers who could submit competitive pricing for the product or services:

Alliance Enterprises, Inc. is the only vendor who is authorized to provide product updates (which include corrections or patches) and/or upgrades (which include enhancements and new features). In addition, Alliance Enterprises, Inc. is the only vendor who has direct access to all source code and technical documentation. The Vendor's sole source certification letter is included as Attachment A.

4. Explanation of why the amount to be expended for the services is reasonable.

Alliance Enterprises, Inc. has proposed a fixed-bid, deliverable based contract. Alliance Enterprises, Inc. will assume the risk if the work takes longer than

anticipated. The ongoing maintenance and periodic upgrades of Aware present a significantly more cost-effective solution. The continuous investment in a system that has proven its reliability and adaptability over the years is prudent, and the familiarity that MDRS staff has developed with Aware also translates into reduced training costs and a smoother transition during software updates.

5. Explanation of what the agency did to obtain the best possible price for these services.

The very nature of a fully customized application, tailored to the specific requirements of MDRS, makes it challenging to estimate costs accurately. Seeking quotes from potential software development organizations necessitates detailed specifications, and even then, the intangible value embedded in the current system remains difficult to translate into a precise dollar amount. Moreover, the risk of overlooking essential customization aspects during the quoting process introduces a level of uncertainty that is incompatible with the proven reliability of Aware. Alliance Enterprises, Inc. has developed designs for future product improvements to align with new Federal regulations. Therefore, the State will not incur costs for a new consultant to listen to all user group meetings and study the designs. This will save the State 20- 30 hours of billable hours. Alliance Enterprises, Inc. is the developer of the system and has all technical documentations and subject matter experts. This knowledge will save the State a minimum of 50 billable hours due to not having a new consultant learn the Aware system, including the data model. Alliance Enterprises, Inc. consultants work remotely on multiple projects at one time and MDRS will only pay for actual time worked and the consultant won't bill for "down time" between meetings with the State. Alliance Enterprises, Inc. provides a variety of job functions to fulfill this project including Account Manager, Project Manager, Sr. Business Systems Analyst, and Sr. Technical Architect. The State does not incur the costs to ramp up each of these individuals or pay their rate while not fully engaged in the project. The new functionality that MDRS would like to purchase has already been written and integrates with the current software.

Schedule

Task	Date
First Advertisement Date	11/28/23
Second Advertisement Date	12/5/23
Response Deadline From Objectors	12/12/23 at 3:00 P.M. Central Time
Notice of Award/No Award Posted	Not before 12/13/23

Project Details

In August 1998, the ITS Board granted sole source approval to the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS) to enter into a multi-state consortium with the States of Alabama, New Mexico, and Idaho for services and software to implement and customize a public domain, web-enabled version of Alliance Enterprises, Inc's Aware vocational rehabilitation case management system. These modifications and services were applied to MDRS's Automated Accessible Casework Environment (AACE) system.

In September 2003, the ITS Board granted sole source approval to MDRS to acquire consulting services from Alliance Enterprises, Inc. for the expansion in functionality of the Independent Living Module for the Office of Special Disability Programs (OSDP). In October 2003, the ITS Board granted an expansion and extension of the existing services agreement with Alliance Enterprises,

Inc. as the sole source provider of maintenance and support services for the AACE system. In August 2015, with the new law changes around sole source acquisitions, ITS advertised Notice of Intent to Certify Sole Source No. 3806 for manufacturer maintenance for the AACE system and integration to the Division of Medicaid's Long-Term Services and Support (LTSS) system. No objections were received from Interested Parties; therefore, ITS certified the request as a sole source. Since December 2018, ITS has continued to issue sole source advertisements for software, maintenance, support, enhancements, upgrades, and training for the AACE system, and has received no objections.

Through this request, MDRS wishes to procure upgrades, support, and maintenance for the existing AACE system. To date, the total purchase authority given to MDRS by ITS for this system is \$10,045,252.00.

Submission Instructions and Format of Response from Objecting Parties

Interested parties who have reason to believe that the upgrades, training, maintenance, and support for the Aware case management system should not be certified as a sole source should provide information in the following format for the state to use in determining whether or not to proceed with awarding the Sole Source contract to Alliance Enterprises Inc.

1.1 Interested Party Information

1.1.1 Contact Name, Phone Number and email address

1.1.2 Company Website URL, if applicable

1.2 Objection to Sole Source Certification

1.2.1 Interested parties must present specific objections to the Sole Source certification using the criteria listed above.

1.2.2 A statement regarding the Interested Party's capabilities as related to this Sole Source Certification Request.

1.3 Comments will be accepted at any time prior to Tuesday, December 12, 2023 at 3:00 p.m. (Central Time) to Matthew Livingston at matthew.livingston@its.ms.gov or at the Mississippi Department of Information Technology Services, 3771 Eastwood Drive, Jackson, Mississippi 39211. Responses may be delivered by hand, via regular mail, overnight delivery, e-mail or by fax. Fax number is (601) 713-6380. ITS WILL NOT BE RESPONSIBLE FOR DELAYS IN THE DELIVERY OF RESPONSES. It is solely the responsibility of the Interested Parties that responses reach ITS on time. Interested Parties may contact Matthew Livingston to verify the receipt of their Responses. Responses received after the deadline will be rejected.

1.4 Interested Party responses should include the following information:

**SUBMITTED IN RESPONSE TO
Sole Source Certification No. 4574-47915
Accepted until December 12, 2023 @ 3:00 p.m.,
ATTENTION: Matthew Livingston**

If you have any questions concerning the information above or if we can be of further assistance, please contact Matthew Livingston at 601-432-8244 or via email at matthew.livingston@its.ms.gov.

Attachment A: Vendor Correspondence

Attachment B: Sole Source Procurement Overview



August 23, 2023

Paula Brown
Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services
PO Box 1690
Jackson, MS 39215

RE: Vendors Authorized to Upgrade, Maintain, and Support *Aware*

Dear Mrs. Brown:

You requested a list of vendors who are authorized to upgrade, maintain, and support the *Aware* Vocational Rehabilitation Case Management System.

Currently, Alliance Enterprises, Inc. is the only vendor who is authorized to provide Updates (which include corrections or patches) and/or Upgrades (which include enhancements and new features) as *Aware* is a proprietary product. In addition, Alliance is the only vendor who has direct access to all source code and technical documentation.

This product has been customized over the years for the unique needs of MDRS. The main core part of the code is for VR and VRB but other modules have been added. Alliance maintenance includes updates to remain compliant with Federal Reporting updates. For MDRS we have added several Modules that make their system unique. These include Service Module, Medicaid Waiver interfaces, Personal Care Attendants, and data exchange with MS System which is used by core partners. The partners for MDRS are MS Department of Employment Security, the College Board and Human Services.

If you need any other explanation or assistance in this subject matter, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Karen Dunn".

Signed: 8/24/2023

Karen Dunn
Chief Executive Officer

Alliance Enterprises
allianceenterprises.com

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Lacey, WA 98516

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Document ID: Y2lxZTUyYzktMG

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Attachment B

The acquisition of information technology for all state agencies and institutions of higher learning (IHLs) is within the scope of the ITS law, found in Mississippi Code Section 25-53-1, et seq., and the policies and procedures established in accordance with this statute, found in the ITS Procurement Handbook posted on the ITS website (www.its.ms.gov).

ITS enabling legislation requires that information technology hardware, software and services be acquired in a manner that insures the maximum of competition among all manufacturers and suppliers of such equipment and services. Accordingly, ITS promotes full and open competition through the issuance of open specifications and the objective evaluation of Interested Party proposals to determine the lowest and best offering to meet an agency's or public university's business requirements. True competition protects the integrity and credibility of purchasing in the public sector and is essential in providing best value and adequate contractual protection for the purchasing entity. In certain limited situations, information technology acquisitions may be sole-sourced.

ITS utilizes the provisions of Public Purchasing Law for Sole Source and Emergency procurements of information technology. Mississippi Public Purchasing Law (Mississippi Code Section 31-7-13) specifies that noncompetitive items available from one source only be exempted from bid requirements (sole-sourced). ITS statute, in Section 25-53-5 (p), permits ITS to utilize provisions in Public Purchasing Law or regulations, when applicable.

Per Public Purchasing law, acquisitions must meet the following criteria to be authorized as sole source:

1. The product or services being purchased must perform a function for which no other product or source of services exists,
2. The purchaser must be able to show specific business objectives that can be met only through the unique product or services, AND
3. The product or services must be available only from the manufacturer and NOT through resellers who could submit competitive pricing for the product or services. The vendor's correspondence regarding this criterion for this project is included as Attachment A.

By policy as documented in the ITS Procurement Handbook, acquisitions of IT services must include the following information to be authorized as sole source:

1. An explanation about why the amount to be expended is reasonable, and
2. An explanation regarding the efforts by the purchaser to obtain the best possible price.

For state agencies, approval of all technology purchases with a lifecycle cost of \$5,000 or less, including sole source purchases, has been delegated to the agency. The ITS Procurement Limits Policies for Agencies (a section in the ITS Procurement Handbook) require a minimum of two competitive written bids or proposals for technology purchases with a lifecycle cost over \$5,000 but not over \$75,000 (not over \$25,000 for projects funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act). Since, for single source items, the procuring agency will be unable to obtain two written bids, ITS must certify all sole source acquisitions of information technology with a lifecycle cost greater than \$5,000.

Institutions of Higher Learning (IHLs) or public universities have been delegated the authority to certify sole source procurements up to \$250,000 lifecycle cost under the ITS Procurement Limits Policies for IHLs (a section in the ITS Procurement Handbook). For the certification of sole source procurements delegated to the CIOs at public universities, the public university must follow ITS' Sole Source Procedure, including advertisement of the intent to award as sole source. Institutions certifying a sole source purchase must ensure the criteria listed above are met and documented in writing by the institution and the Interested Party prior to certifying a product or service as sole source. Sole source documentation must be reviewed and approved by the IHL's CIO for any sole-source certification

above \$5,000. All sole source documentation should be retained in the public university's procurement file. Sole source requests above \$250,000 lifecycle cost require ITS approval.

Other than the delegations outlined above, all sole source technology procurements must be certified by ITS.

ITS thoroughly reviews Sole Source Certification Requests, determining if competing products and/or services exist. If so, ITS conducts a competitive procurement. If ITS' review confirms the sole source, then a Sole Source advertisement is issued, giving other Interested Parties an opportunity to identify competing products and/or services. Based upon the results of the Sole Source advertisement, ITS will either certify the request as a sole source or conduct a competitive procurement.