

Request for Proposal

SERS Telecommunications Platform

JUNE 2023



SCHOOL EMPLOYEES RETIREMENT SYSTEM OF OHIO

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I. INTRODUCTION

The School Employees Retirement System of Ohio (SERS) is requesting proposals from qualified vendors to implement and migrate its current on-premise private branch exchange (PBX) system, voice mail, and contact center to a cloud-hosted solution.

II. BACKGROUND

SERS is a statewide defined benefit retirement system for non-certificated persons employed by the public schools within the state's cities, villages, and counties, as well as local districts, vocational and technical schools, community colleges, and The University of Akron. SERS provides service retirement, disability and survivor benefits, and access to health care coverage for benefit recipients and their dependents. General administration and management of the plan is vested in the Retirement Board established under [Chapter 3309](#) of the Ohio Revised Code.

SERS is a mid-sized organization located in Columbus, OH employing approximately 180 people, working a 3/2 hybrid schedule. The facility includes Intel-Microsoft personal computer (PC) workstations and thin client Virtual Desktop Infrastructure. Additional technology includes enterprise servers, virtualization technology, storage, security controls, internal and external connections, and M365 E5 GCC tenant.

III. SCOPE OF SERVICES

SERS is seeking a qualified vendor to provide the following:

- A fully available, cloud-hosted Unified Communication as a Service (UCaaS) and Contact Center as a Service (CCaaS) solution, available 24x7x365 to support SERS business communication needs.
- A Contact Center architecture that includes multi-channel capabilities, such as voice, email, chat, callback, and SMS that will enable SERS to provide a first-class member experience.

SERS is currently using the telephony equipment and services in Appendix A. The telephony equipment and related software applications will be upgraded and/or replaced by the proposed cloud solution, as part of this RFP.

SERS will consider only proposals for the goods and/or services as described above. **Responses submitted for other goods and/or services will not be considered.**

IV. PROPOSAL SUBMISSIONS

A. Intent to Respond

If the vendor intends to respond to this RFP, a Notice of Intent to do so should be sent to SERS by **Monday, July 10, 2023**. The Notice should be sent by email to the SERS contact listed in Paragraph C. below, and contain the vendor's name, its intent to respond, the name of a contact person and their telephone number, and email. Submitting this Notice will not obligate a vendor to submit a Response nor be a prerequisite for submitting a Response but will allow SERS to send out any necessary information to interested vendors.

B. Response Deadline

The completed Response must be received by **Monday, July 31, 2023, 5 p.m. Eastern Time**. Responses received after the Response deadline will not be considered.

C. Delivery

Contact person for all responses, and communications:

Mike Flanagan
Assistant Director
IT Infrastructure Services
School Employees Retirement System
300 East Broad Street, Suite 100
Columbus, OH 43215
[SERS RFP Response@ohsers.org](mailto:SERS_RFP_Response@ohsers.org)
Phone: 614-222-5932

Send an electronic version of the Response to the above contact person. Faxed transmissions are not acceptable and will not be considered.

D. Response Documents

All of the following documents must be submitted together and in the order listed.

- A Cover Letter submitting the vendor's Response on the vendor's letterhead signed by at least one individual who is authorized to bind the vendor contractually
- Documentation supporting the requirements in Appendix A
- The Questionnaire in Appendix B
- Sample Project plan for implementing the solution, training, and service delivery
- A tentative schedule for performing the services with estimated hours by major task
- Sample Dashboard Reports, both real-time and historical
- Completed Appendix C, UCaaS, CCaaS Requirements Matrix, including pricing

E. Submitted Responses

Any Response submitted will become the property of SERS. SERS reserves the right to retain all Responses submitted, and use any information contained in a Response except as otherwise prohibited by law. **All Responses and the contents thereof will be deemed to be a public record which is open to public inspection after a vendor has been selected and contract has been executed, if any.** Vendors are encouraged to include one additional copy of its Response with any proprietary trade secret information redacted and marked as such with a brief written basis as to why it believes the information is protected from disclosure. In the event that SERS receives a public records request to which, in SERS' sole discretion, any of a vendor's materials are responsive, SERS will release the redacted version of the vendor's materials; in the event no redacted materials are submitted, SERS may release the vendor's unredacted materials without notice to the vendor. In the event any of the vendor's redactions are challenged, the vendor shall have sole responsibility to defend such redactions at its cost and expense. SERS will not institute any legal action to defend any of vendor's redactions but will notify the vendor of such challenges.

F. Communications with SERS

Vendors which intend to submit a Response should not contact any member of SERS Staff or members of the Retirement Board. An exception to this rule applies to vendors who currently do business with SERS, but any contact made by such vendor(s) with persons should be limited to that business and should not relate to this RFP.

G. Questions Relating to this RFP

All questions concerning this RFP must be received in writing by email to the Contact person by **Monday, July 17, 2023, 4 p.m., Eastern Time**. Answers to emailed questions received by this deadline will be available to all vendors by a posting at www.ohsers.org. Questions submitted after this deadline, or other than by email will not be considered.

V. SELECTION PROCESS

SERS staff will evaluate all timely and complete Responses. SERS reserves the right to request that any Response be clarified or supplemented.

SERS will complete initial scoring and select the top three proposals to perform product demonstrations. Following the demonstrations, SERS will re-score proposals, make a final decision and contract negotiations. If SERS does not reach an agreement with the highest scoring proposal, SERS may continue such negotiations with subsequent finalists until a contract is negotiated or SERS decides not to award the contract pursuant to this RFP.

VI. TENTATIVE TIMETABLE

The following is the tentative time schedule for SERS' search for vendors to provide the requested services. All dates are subject to modification by SERS without prior notice.

| | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Issuance of RFP: | June 26, 2023 |
| Intent to Respond: | July 10, 2023 |
| Question Deadline: | July 17, 2023, 4 p.m., Eastern Time |
| Response to Written Questions: | July 24, 2023 |
| RFP Response Deadline: | July 31, 2023, 5 p.m. Eastern Time |
| Product Demonstration: | August 1 – August 2023 |
| Projected Commencement Date: | October 1, 2023 |

The vendor(s) selected must enter into a contract.

VII. CRITERIA

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- Product requirements and features described in Appendix A
- Vendor qualifications, including the minimum qualifications identified in Appendix A and responses to the questionnaire in Appendix B
- Proposed project plan
- Product and professional services cost

VIII. QUESTIONNAIRE

Vendors must complete the Questionnaire appearing in Appendix B. Responses to the questions should repeat the question and be answered in order.

IX. TERMS AND CONDITIONS

SERS makes no representations or warranties, expressed or implied, as to the accuracy or completeness of the information in the RFP and nothing contained herein is or shall be relied upon as a promise or representation, whether as to the past or the future. The RFP does not purport to contain all of the information that may be required to evaluate the RFP and any recipient hereof should conduct its own independent analysis of SERS and the data contained or referenced herein. SERS does not anticipate updating or otherwise revising the RFP. However, this RFP may be withdrawn, modified, or re-circulated at any time at the sole discretion of SERS.

SERS reserves the right, at its sole discretion and without giving reasons or notice, at any time and in any respect, to alter these procedures, to change and alter any and all criteria, to terminate discussions, to accept or reject any Response, in whole or in part, to negotiate modifications or revisions to a Response and to negotiate with any one or more respondents to the RFP.

SERS is not and will not be under any obligation to accept, review or consider any Response to the RFP, and is not and will not be under any obligation to accept the lowest offer submitted or any offer at all. SERS is not and will not be under any obligation to any recipient of, or any respondent to, the RFP except as expressly stated in any binding agreement ultimately entered into with one or more parties, either as part of this RFP process, or otherwise. Any decision to enter into a binding agreement with a respondent to this RFP is in SERS' sole discretion.

This RFP is not an offer but a request to receive a Response. SERS will consider a Response as an offer to develop an agreement based upon the contents of the Response. Respondents agree that the contents of their Responses are valid for one year from the date of submission. SERS will not be liable for any cost incurred in the preparation of a Response and will not reimburse any respondents for their submission. Expenses related to the production of a Response are the sole responsibility of the respondent.

Appendix A

Qualifications and Requirements

SERS' CURRENT ENVIRONMENT:

SERS staff and contact center agents work a 3/2 hybrid schedule where the remote location is often a home office.

PBX:

- Avaya CS1000e 7.6 PBX (Nortel)
- 240 M39xx series phones (includes: 69 M3905 call center phones)
- 86 Analog devices (18 Fax, 9 Polycom, 24 CFAs, 15 Wall phones, 20 misc.)
- 33 i2050 softphone clients
- 2 ISDN PRI trunks
- 600 DID numbers (approx. 300 in use)
- 5 Toll Free numbers
- Traffic: Total Calls - 22K avg/month, 82K Minutes avg/month
- Traffic: Toll free, local, and domestic and international long distance

Voicemail:

- Avaya CallPilot 5.1 (Nortel)
- 186 mailboxes (user and department)
- Applications: Voicemail, Auto-Attendant with TOD, AACC integration
- 24 Voicemail & AA ports, 8 AACC integration ports

Contact Center:

- Avaya Aura Contact Center 7.1 (AML)
- 45 Voice agent license pool
- 5 Voice supervisor license pool
- Historical reports, Real Time Display, Agent Desktop Display
- Traffic: Incoming Calls – 13K avg/month, 61K Minutes avg/month

Call Recording:

- TelStrat Engage 5.4 Call Recording
- TALC integration to PBX – 80 ports (69 ports in use)
- Recording Inbound Contact Center calls only
- Call recording retention period: 120 days
- Quality Evaluation review / Coaching modules

CDR Reports:

- Impact Technologies Traffic Analyst
- Organization file & Call Record reporting

MINIMUM VENDOR QUALIFICATIONS

SERS is seeking a qualified vendor to migrate SERS' telephone systems including, but not limited to, the contact center, to a suitable Unified Communications as a Service (UCaaS) and Contact Center as a Service (CCaaS) VOIP solution. The proposer must offer both UCaaS and CCaaS solutions, implementation, and post-sale support.

- Vendor must have a Unified Communication as a Service (UCaaS), Interactive Voice Response and Contact Center as a Service (CCaaS) solution that is commercially available to all customers. The solution will require minimal modifications or customization and will meet substantially all of SERS' defined requirements. The vendor must be able to demonstrate the product(s) meets SERS defined requirements.
- Prior to signing the contract, the vendor is required to provide a proof of concept (POC) or trial software that allows SERS to validate the fundamental features of UCaaS (Unified Communications as a Service) and CCaaS (Contact Center as a Service).
- Vendor must have a minimum of (5) five years experience in successful implementation of their cloud-hosted UCaaS and CCaaS solutions and migration from on-premise to cloud-based solutions. Experience preferred with, but not limited to, migration from Avaya/Nortel on premise solutions.
- Vendor must have completed at a minimum two fully operational system implementations of similar or larger size and scope and at least averaging over 800 contact center incoming calls per day.
- Vendor must provide at least 3 references for work completed with similar requirements as to those described in this RFP.
- Vendor must complete this RFP's "UCaaS, CCaaS Requirements matrix" (Appendix C) and provide appropriate supplemental system information and documentation to demonstrate their software's functionality and responsiveness.
- The Vendor Project Manager is a key role and will be responsible for all interactions with solution team members for the design, delivery, and configuration implementation and testing. SERS' Assistant Director of IT Infrastructure Services will sign off on the delivered solution prior to implementation.
- Vendor will manage the proposer resources as a single SERS delivery team and will provide dedicated resources to perform the migration and implementation work. Vendor must clearly demonstrate they will have sufficient resources during project implementation and for post implementation support.
- Vendor responsibilities include, but are not limited to, the design, provisioning, enablement, management, training, maintenance, administration, and on-going support of the CCaaS and VOIP components.

REQUIREMENTS OVERVIEW (UCaaS, CCaaS, VOIP)

SERS seeks to migrate from an on-premise PBX and Contact Center solution to a suitable Unified Communications as a Service (UCaaS) and Contact Center as a Service (CCaaS) VOIP solution. This section is a narrative overview of features intended to complement the requirements articulated in the detailed Appendix C UCaaS, CCaaS Requirements Matrix.

UCaaS Solution

- E911 support, including simultaneous on-site notification to the building security desk phone when an emergency call is placed.
- SERS licenses Microsoft 365 E5 a GCC tenant and uses MS Teams for internal messaging and meetings with both internal and external participants. The proposal should describe how the solution will interface/integrate with MS Teams and Outlook.
- Staff will use softphones with headsets and desk phones, depending on personal preference. Support for Poly desk phones & conference phones required, some users will have phones. Please provide feature details available in the softphone client and supported physical phones, including browser compatibility for both business and CCaaS users.

CCaaS Solution:

To facilitate a high level of customer service, SERS envisions a solution that will include a robust set of Agent Desktop capabilities for handling Member communications:

- Highly automated, approach where CSRs can respond to and interact with Members utilizing inbound and outbound interaction channels, including voice, SMS, email, and web chat.
- A comprehensive set of internal communication tools, including instant messaging and warm call transfer will facilitate seamless call escalation between CSRs and their Managers, as well as in- call coaching by Managers (“whisper” functionality).
- Monitor real-time call center performance and identify areas for improvement, including presence of agents available, paused, or engaged in an interaction.
- Record inbound calls and other channel interactions with screen capture, playback and other quality assurance tools for auditing and scoring.
- In the initial phase, SERS plans to implement voice, fax, webchat, and SMS interaction channels.
- In a future implementation, SERS plans to offer its members self-service IVR through natural language speech recognition and touchtone DTMF. Members will authenticate using unique personal identifiers and gain access to personalized interactions, including account information.
- In a future implementation, screen pops from SERS’ account management system will provide CSRs with key information, including inbound member interactions and member account. Please provide details on scripting tools and IVR capabilities.

Mobile and web conferencing

SERS uses the M365 platform and InTune, including Teams and Outlook for calendar, email, messaging, and web-based conferencing on both iOS and Android platforms. SERS also uses Zoom for large group web-based conferencing.

SURVIVABILITY, REDUNDANCY AND NETWORK RELIABILITY

Security

The Vendor must follow an industry standard such as CSA, CIS, NIST, or ISO27001. The solution proposed must be compliant with at least one of the industry standard security frameworks such as Cloud Security Alliance (CSA) – STAR Level 2, SSAE18/SSAE16 SOC2, or similar.

The proposer shall describe the shared security responsibility model and clearly define the roles and responsibilities of SERS and the vendor. Describe the approach to security during the development process such as design, secure coding practices, third-party components, testing and validation, management of security findings, vulnerability response and disclosure, managing culture and training. Provide information security policies, procedures and response plan. Provide the frequency of performance of intrusion testing.

Please describe the virtual and physical security of your data center, including monitoring and processes in place for excessive, suspicious, or unauthorized attempts to access, including but not limited to:

- Account takeover
- Abuse of network or service
- Infrastructure or application-based attacks
- Man-in-the middle (Eavesdropping) or session hijacking
- Distribute Denial of Service DDoS attacks
- Phishing/Pharming
- Impersonation or Spoofing (IP or CLI/ANI)
- Traffic Pumping to toll-free numbers
- Voicemail hacking, Callback scheme and Toll Fraud
- Robocalls/Nuisance calls
- Access to Call Screen Recording or call log data
- Intentional or unintentional download of HIPAA/PII information
- Insecure backup of recordings or long-term storage

Describe data protection measures, including:

- Data encryption at rest and in transit
- Web application firewall products
- Multi-level or role-based security

The Proposer will be required to notify SERS within 24 hours of any identified security breach within the solution provided or exposure of PII information. Describe the data available for ingest by a SIEM in a CIM compliant log format.

Explain the methodology used to assess security and make recommendations to SERS staff. Describe your supply chain risk management strategy and how you stay informed of possible hygiene issues related to your vendors. Describe any security breaches you may have had in the past 5 years.

Disaster recovery

SERS' telecommunications functionality is a mission-critical system.

- Solution must provide redundant US-based data centers at the provider level for SERS purchased services and calls must remain active and not drop during failover unless specifically disclosed in the proposal.

- If a data center were to fail, the solution should be able to continue making E911 calls during the hosted location outage.
- If a site loses connectivity, all automated attendants will continue to be played and transferred to Voice Mail or held in Queue for contact center. Calls unable to be answered on site will be answered by Voice Mail allowing staff to retrieve those messages via cell phone or after connectivity is restored.
- For users that have a single number reach programmed, the calls will ring on the preprogrammed devices i.e., cell phone.
- Describe how outages are reported, and ongoing communications handled during a service impacting event or outage. (Service impacting is defined as 20% of the UCaaS solution and 5% of the contact center solution.)
- Describe how system incidents are tracked, classified, and reported, including resolution and escalation procedures.
- Describe any system outage in the last 2 years which resulted in customer disruption of more than 60 minutes.

SYSTEM MANAGEMENT

Maintenance and release management

- Describe system maintenance procedures, including schedules, communications, and unavailability. Response should include information on all types of releases, such as security updates, system maintenance, and enhancements to UCaaS and CCaaS.
- Provide a detailed description of how SERS system administrators and Call Center Management can control implementation of which new features are implemented and (accept or delay) feature changes in major/minor releases.

Dashboards and reports

SERS envisions a CCaaS solution with extensive dashboard reporting and analytics capabilities for all interaction types.

- The solution will enable real-time views to monitor ongoing CSR activity, including active CSRs, callers in queue and hold times.
- Historical reporting and trend analysis should include deep insights into call volume, call time, call subject, member characteristics and CSR's performance.
- Please provide a list of standard reports and details on the tools used to create custom real-time and historical reports.

API technology and integration

SERS envisions a solution that will integrate seamlessly with key commercial and custom applications. For proprietary applications, the solution must support implementation of custom integrations (e.g., web services, SQL database).

Integrations will typically key off a primary identifier and need to be able to trigger business rules in the IVR to deliver personalized scripting and messaging to the Member or screen pops to the CSR with member account information.

Potential IVR/CTI Solution Integration points:

SMART is an enterprise pension administration solution for SERS and is based on MS windows

technology with .NET Framework (C#) and a SQL DB. Computer telephony integration (CTI) for screen pops to agent, and the IVR will be integrated to SMART in a future development phase.

Please list all prebuilt API integrations to third party solutions for the proposed CCaaS & UCaaS solution.

Appendix B

QUESTIONNAIRE

Responses to the following questions should repeat the question and be answered in order. Limit each response to no more than one-half page.

A. Vendor

1. Provide the vendor's name and the principal office's address, telephone number, and website and the name, address, and email address of the primary contact for this proposal.
2. Specify how many years the vendor has been in business and describe whether within the last 18 months the vendor has undergone or intends to undergo any material change in its structure or ownership.
3. Provide at least three (3) references for projects of similar size, scope and business focus that SERS can contact. Include the name and telephone number of the reference who may be contacted and provide a summary description of services performed.
4. Provide a sample contract or statement of work with your proposal for consideration if you are selected for this engagement.
5. How many customers use your cloud solution?

B. Product(s) Offering

1. Provide an overview of the technical architecture.
2. Provide an overview of the system administration capabilities.
3. What are the user desktop requirements?
4. Describe how the different applications that make up your cloud solutions are integrated and work together.
5. How are home and mobile workers supported? Describe any limitations with access to the platform.
6. Are real-time, on-demand and historical reporting features included? Provide details of the reporting and analytics capabilities.
7. Do you offer native ability to handle omnichannel engagement, including mobile, web, chat, email, phone/voice messaging, and SMS?

C. Personnel

1. Describe the vendor's bonding process and coverage of employees.
2. Affirm that no staff assigned to work on this project has been convicted of a felony.
3. If you intend to use subcontractors for any part of the project, please provide the name and address of the firm and a brief description of the services provided.

D. Standards of Conduct

1. Does the company have a written anti-discrimination policy? If so, attach a copy and state how the policy is monitored and enforced.
2. How does the company identify and manage conflicts of interest?

3. Are there any potential conflicts of interest that the company would have in providing the requested services to SERS? If yes, explain.
4. List and describe any relationships and/or contact the company or its officers or employees have had with any SERS Retirement Board member and/or staff member within the last 12 months.
5. Has the company or any officer or employee given any remuneration or anything of value directly or indirectly to SERS or any of its Retirement Board members, officers, or employees? If yes, identify the recipient and remuneration or thing of value. Additional information on the Ohio ethics law in this area may be found at:

http://ethics.ohio.gov/education/factsheets/doing_business_with_retirement_systems_in_ohio.pdf.

6. Has the company or any officer, principal or employee given any remuneration or anything of value such as a finder's fee, cash solicitation fee, or fee for consulting, lobbying or otherwise, in connection with this RFP? If yes, identify the recipient and remuneration or thing of value.

Within the last five (5) years:

- a. Has the company or any officer or employee of the company been a defending party in a legal proceeding before a court related to the provision of telecommunications goods and services?
- b. Has the company or any officer or employee been the subject of a governmental regulatory agency inquiry, investigation, or charge?
- c. Has the company submitted a claim to the company's liability insurance carrier involving the type or provision of telecommunications goods and services sought under this RFP?

If yes to any of the above, describe the event and the current status or resolution; include any case citation.