

Choosing the Right Student Support Partner

A PRE-RFP GUIDE TO STRONGER EVALUATION
AND LONG-TERM VALUE



Executive Summary

An RFP isn't just a request for information. It's a statement of what your institution values in a student support partner.

Your evaluation criteria establish the framework for evaluating competing models against what matters most to your institution.

A strong RFP sets clear expectations for access, care quality, outcomes, operational readiness, financial value, and long-term partnership.

This guide helps you define those priorities before procurement begins, so your institution can develop an effective RFP and evaluate prospective partners with greater clarity and confidence.

Start Before Procurement Begins

The RFP helps your institution identify the partner best equipped to support your students, strengthen campus resources, and advance institutional priorities.

Before comparing vendors, align on what success looks like for your institution. What role should an external partner play? Which student populations are you trying to reach? How will you measure impact? Which capabilities are essential, and which are simply nice to have?

These decisions become the foundation of your evaluation process, and ultimately, your partnership.

What Institutions Are Evaluating Now

The most meaningful differences between student support partners aren't always visible in a feature comparison.

Today's institutions are evaluating how a model performs after implementation: how students engage, how care quality is maintained, how referrals are coordinated, how outcomes are measured, and how the partnership contributes to broader institutional goals.

QUESTIONS LIKE THESE INCREASINGLY SHAPE THE EVALUATION PROCESS:

1. How are student outcomes measured?
2. How is care quality maintained?
3. What happens after a student is referred?
4. How are students engaged throughout the academic year?
5. What reporting supports institutional decision-making?
6. How does this partnership strengthen our existing student support ecosystem?

The goal is to identify a partner whose operating model aligns with your institution's priorities.

What Your RFP Should Evaluate

CONNECTED STUDENT CARE AND SUPPORT

Student needs rarely occur in isolation. A student seeking counseling may also be navigating academic stress, financial strain, physical health concerns, or basic needs. Strong support models recognize these connections and make it easier for students to access the right level of support without navigating disconnected services.

Your RFP should evaluate whether the model:

1. Connects multiple forms of support within one student experience
2. Helps students identify where to begin
3. Supports emerging needs alongside clinical care
4. Makes movement between services intentional—not incidental

ACCESS AND AVAILABILITY

Access is only meaningful when students know where to begin and can get help when they need it. Availability should be evaluated from the student's perspective, not simply by service hours or appointment volume.

Evaluate:

1. Time to care
2. Availability during evenings, weekends, and academic breaks
3. Access for online, commuter, and adult learners
4. A clear, intuitive entry point into support

CARE QUALITY AND PROVIDER MODEL

Provider count isn't the same as clinical quality. A meaningful evaluation should look beyond network size to understand how providers are hired, supervised, and supported.

Evaluate:

1. Hiring and credentialing standards
2. Clinical supervision
3. Quality assurance
4. Performance management

Crisis Readiness

Crisis response should include a clear path to follow-up care. Strong models pair immediate support with coordinated next steps, appropriate communication with campus teams, and continuity of care.

Evaluate:

1. Escalation pathways
2. After-hours clinical coverage
3. Campus communication protocols
4. Follow-up and ongoing support

Student Engagement and Adoption

Student engagement requires ongoing attention. Students cannot benefit from services they do not know exist or do not understand how to use.

Evaluate whether the partner has a structured approach to:

1. Student awareness
2. Ongoing engagement
3. Utilization measurement
4. Proactive outreach
5. Continuous improvement

REPORTING AND OUTCOMES

The most valuable reporting helps institutional leaders understand performance, identify opportunities, and measure progress toward strategic goals.

Evaluate visibility into:

1. Utilization
2. Student outcomes
3. Referral completion
4. Equity and access
5. Emerging trends
6. Program impact



Care Coordination and Referrals

A referral isn't complete until a student successfully connects to care.

The quality of a student support model depends not only on the services it provides, but also on how effectively it connects students to campus and community resources.

Evaluate visibility into:

1. Referral coordination
2. Completion tracking
3. Follow-up processes
4. Integration with existing case management

Implementation and Launch

Implementation determines how quickly a partnership begins delivering value.

Evaluate whether the implementation approach includes:

1. Clearly defined roles
2. Campus stakeholder engagement
3. Student communication planning
4. Dedicated implementation support
5. Shared success measures

Partnership and Ongoing Success

The value of a student support partnership continues well beyond implementation. As student needs, utilization patterns, and institutional priorities evolve, your partner should help your team interpret performance, identify opportunities, and adjust the program over time.

Evaluate whether the partner provides:

1. Dedicated account management
2. Regular performance reviews
3. Recommendations based on utilization and outcomes
4. Ongoing engagement planning
5. Support for continuous program improvement
6. A collaborative approach to changing institutional priorities



Pricing and Long-Term Value

Evaluate pricing in the context of outcomes, operational impact, flexibility, and long-term sustainability.

Evaluate:

1. Pricing transparency
2. Capacity management
3. Scalability
4. Budget predictability

SUPPORT FOR DIVERSE STUDENT POPULATIONS

Eligibility doesn't guarantee accessibility. A student support model should reflect how your students actually live, learn, and seek support.

Evaluate whether the model effectively serves:

1. Online learners
2. Working adults
3. Student parents
4. Military-affiliated students
5. Commuter and graduate students

Questions Every Campus Should Be Asking

A well-designed RFP asks questions that reveal how a model operates.

AS YOU PREPARE YOUR EVALUATION, CONSIDER ASKING:

- 1.** How do you measure student outcomes?
- 2.** How do students find the right level of support?
- 3.** How is clinical quality governed?
- 4.** How are referrals tracked to completion?
- 5.** How are students engaged after implementation?
- 6.** How does reporting support institutional decision-making?
- 7.** What implementation resources are included?
- 8.** How does pricing evolve over the life of the partnership?
- 9.** How does the model support online and adult learners?
- 10.** How do you define a successful

Before finalizing requirements, bring together Student Affairs, Counseling, Health Services, Finance, Procurement, and executive leadership to establish shared expectations around:

- Institutional priorities
- Student populations
- Desired outcomes
- Success measures
- Reporting requirements
- Budget considerations
- Governance
- Partnership expectations

Alignment before procurement creates a stronger foundation for evaluating proposals—and a smoother path toward implementation.



Final Perspective

An effective RFP does more than compare services. It reflects what your institution values in a student support partner and creates a framework for identifying the model best equipped to support your students, strengthen existing campus resources, and advance institutional priorities.

The decisions made before procurement begins will shape the proposals you receive, the conversations you have, and the partnership you ultimately choose.

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