

International Rescue Committee

**Request for Proposal (RFP)**

**AudioClass (Technology solution partner for educational messaging platform)**

August 2021

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# INTRODUCTION:

## The International Rescue Committee

The International Rescue Committee, hereinafter referred to as “the IRC”, is a non-profit, humanitarian agency that provides relief, rehabilitation, protection, resettlement services, and advocacy for refugees, displaced persons and victims of oppression and violent conflict.

Working in over 40 countries, the IRC is a leader in humanitarian relief - bringing sustained support to regions torn apart by conflict and disaster. In addition to our work overseas, the IRC also has 29 U.S. resettlement offices that help newly arrived refugees by providing immediate services. The IRC advocates on behalf of the displaced by addressing the root causes of conflict and standing up for the world’s most vulnerable populations. The IRC's strategy centers on its ambition to continue to improve the scale and effectiveness of IRC programs worldwide with evidence of what works best to impact people’s lives in conflict and fragile settings. Building local capacity and self-sufficiency -- and promoting human rights, participation and accountability -- are at the core of all of IRC’s innovative programs.

## Program Context

In Colombia, where at least 4 million Venezuelans have crossed the border to seek refuge, the education system is struggling to support an unprecedented influx of students. Since 2019, the Norwegian Rescue Committee (NRC) has identified over 9,000 out-of-school children and adolescents in Colombia in the area of Norte de Santander, the main area of ingress from Venezuela. NRC identified an increase of 60% in adolescents dropping out of school and 80% of out-of-school individuals are past the age limit for catch-up programming, which hampers their ability to advance in regular classes. While solutions are available for primary-aged children, many are capped at age 14, leaving older adolescents without many options. The situation in Colombia is one example of the compounding effect that being out of school has on already disadvantaged children.

Built on 30 years of experience of education in emergency settings, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) has been leading the global humanitarian community in re- thinking how we can reach more children with safe, quality education.

# PROJECT BACKGROUND:

AudioClass is an educational message sharing system. Through AudioClass (ACS), educational content can be accessed across any device teachers and students have at hand. Students learn on any mobile device available to them using personalized messaging, and teachers are able to use a live dashboard to track student progress over time.

Uniquely among our peers, AudioClass addresses barriers to education access by **utilizing low to medium technology** that does not require students to have access to computers, tablets, or strong internet connection to access learning.

IRC is currently using a pilot platform for AudioClass, and intends to build up and scale out a solution to support the needs of AudioClass in Colombia, and the needs of other education programs in the region and globally. It envisages the platform being used by students, teachers, caregivers and facilitators.

## Scope of Work

The IRC will establish a contractual agreement with one or more business service providers (BSP) or Provider who can:

* Create an end to end solution - leveraging another platform such as Twilio, Dialogflow, or RapidPro if necessary
* Provide these features through any technology stack to facilitate automation of interactive educational messaging via WhatsApp, (and ideally also through Facebook Messenger, or Telegram) to students, and create an easy to use dashboard for teachers to create content and track their students.
* Assist with the set-up of a WhatsApp Business API for the program in Colombia including;
  + provide flow guidance and opportunities
  + automate communication flows based on curriculum content provided
  + train IRC staff and teachers on using the dashboard
  + collect data from participants during implementation
  + provide ongoing technical support.
* It is crucial that the BSP/Provider provide an ongoing in-depth analysis report of the experience including engagement, effectiveness, customer satisfaction, comparisons between students and provide raw data reports.

Based on successful rollout of the platform in Colombia, the platform will be considered for use in other IRC programs, e.g. the Ahlan Simsim in the Middle East and Play Matters in East Africa.

## Requirements

* Content creation
  + Allow for creation of learning content modules, curricula and interactive assessments
  + Allow for creation of automated content flows in a user friendly platform such as drag and drop or provide developer support.
  + Allow for easy content/flow refinement
  + Allow for gamification of content, share badges, track points
  + Tracking & URL Shortening features to share link for multimedia contents
* NLP support
  + Support for ad-hoc questions and NLP-driven chat interactions and flows
  + GUI-based with drag and drop, a code-free interface that enables people without coding knowledge to build flows, broadcasts and chatbots.
  + Support interactive chat and provide conversational experience to the learners through Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Natural Language Processing (NLP)
* Coaching and human interaction
  + Allow for teacher coaching and support via the platform
  + Allow for escalation from content to coach/teacher support, e.g. type “HELP” to message a facilitator
* WhatsApp (or other messaging platform)
  + Easy navigation of options
  + Able to share automated content through WhatsApp messaging such as: audio notes, text, images, links, videos, emojis and gifs.
  + Able to share a variety of interactive response features such as: multiple choice questions, open ended audio recording, open ended text responses
  + Able to accept, track and record messages from participants such as: audio notes, text, and images.
  + Able to accept responses as correct or incorrect and respond accordingly
  + Able to share surveys
  + Help menu that triggers automated response or escalates to real human
  + Nudge or AI predictive capabilities (if users write in unknown option, unresponsive for certain amount of time, gamification opportunities, progress updates)
  + Student enrollment flow (data collection, participation approval)
  + Support template design and submission to register new templates for dissemination of Document, Video, and Audio Contents through WhatsApp
  + Verify active WhatsApp numbers before adding them to the contact database.
  + Single cloud-based platform covering major channels and chat apps e.g. SMS, WhatsApp, Facebook, WebChat, Viber and Telegram etc.
* Dashboard and admin features:
  + Easy to use for low-tech literacy users
  + Display flow progress by student and by class
  + Display drop-out rates / retention, ideally flags “at risk of dropping out” before the students drop out
  + Display correct/incorrect answers by student
  + Display grades by topic by student
  + Display survey results
  + Display messages delivered and read
  + Display data combination of experiences, whatsapp
  + Display engagement results, most engaged, least, etc.
  + Allow teacher to grade open ended questions and images
  + Allow teacher to communicate with participants through text message, image, audio note or call
  + Allow teacher (or system) to trigger messages (nudges)
  + Allow teacher to download report
* Support for program multi-tenancy
  + Allow for creation of multiple programs and organisation structures to allow for creation of multiple programs with varying program structures, i.e. ideal structure could look like:
    - Program (e.g. for Audio Class in Colombia)
      * Course (Grade 6)
        + Modules: literacy, math, science
      * Course (teacher training grade 6)
  + Allow for different levels of security, access and reporting for different programs and courses
* Flag inappropriate content, track trigger words for safeguarding, and ability to quickly block content and disable users
* Language support
  + Must be able to support content in multiple languages
  + Dashboard and admin features should ideally be localizable to multiple languages
  + NLP and AI should support multiple languages
  + Languages
    - Spanish
    - Other Latin alphabet languages
    - Arabic (including right to left support)
* High security and privacy protocols for data protection, ideally GDPR (or equivalent) compliant
* Must provide reporting and analytics of the communication governed over WhatsApp and other messaging platforms.
* Must support data collection and survey through WhatsApp and other messaging platforms maintain data on Excel (xls) or Comma Separated Value (csv)

## Expected Activities

* Design workshop
* Calls or workshops on platform features and opportunities
* Help create customer service plan
* Help create plan for digital monitoring and evaluation of data
* Work with team to identify data to be tracked and opportunities
* Train program staff, local partner organizations and teachers on using platform and editing content flows
* Create automation flows based on content delivered by IRC or provide support for IRC staff / developer
* Create user friendly dashboard for teachers
* Data dashboard for IRC staff or data reports
* Prototype and test flows before implementation
* Refine experience and resolve bugs from prototyping
* Finalized flows
* Deliver messages
* Provide technical support during implementation
* Provide data and data analysis as appropriate

## Deliverables

* Workplan
* Customer service plan
* Dashboard design
* Assessment of flows (where do students drop off during the lesson?)
* Delivery of messages
* Training guides and cheat sheets
* Technical support summary
* Data analysis based on previous identified indicators
* Raw data

## Pricing

* Service provider MUST submit their quotation keeping in view all the IRC’s requirements and clauses of the RFP. Failure of such, proposals will be considered incomplete and may be disqualified
* All costs to be given in USD only.
* Pricing to be broken down by:
  + Annual license costs for software proposed in technology stack
  + One-off customization, adaptation costs to meet IRC requirements
  + Recurring charges for usage of messaging platforms, SMS
  + Human resource costs - Project management, training and support
* Pricing must cover ALL COSTS, including any service tax, and/or taxes on commissions and all other taxes required by the country, duties, levies, and insurance.

## Proposal Process

In order to finalize the IRC selection of the most appropriate provider to satisfy our needs, the following information is required in each proposal. **The proposal MUST contain all of the information requested below:**

* + - Please clearly indicate your past experience with similar projects.
    - Please state the countries and regions you can provide services to and in what capacity. Annex 1 includes a list of IRC’s current and Watch List countries
    - Do you have any existing partnerships with other providers for the provision of the same service? Please specify the name of the institution if any.
    - Your total lump sum fees and charges associated with each phase of the project including the breakdown unit cost/miscellaneous of such total cost.
    - The type of customer support provided on an on-going basis, response time, and any additional associated costs, as well as how such support is accessed.
    - A clear identification of the reports available and the level of detail to which IRC access activity reports..

## Quality Standards

* + - Meets industry standards for Regulatory, Compliance & Risk Management (including partners)
    - Provider has redundant back-office systems to provide adequate back up and continued functionality during emergency situations.
    - Fully responsible for meeting in-country Legal, Regulatory, and Currency Requirements
    - Meets industry standard for Data Integrity & Security (including partners)
    - Fully responsible for anti-money laundering and Anti-terrorism policy compliance with countries in which they are working. Conduct appropriate checks as requested. For example, Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) USA regulations. Provider must provide opportunity to further verify identities of partial matches.
    - Provider operates a web based, online system for managing accounts that is accessible by the IRC.

## RFP Timeline

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Issue Request for Proposal** | *August 25th, 2021* |
| **Suppliers Return Signed Intent to Bid Forms** | *As Soon As Possible* |
| **Questions from Suppliers Due** | *September 24th , 2021* |
| **Answers to Suppliers Questions Due** | *September 30th, 2021* |
| **Bid Submission Due** | *Midnight EST October 11th, 2021* |
| **Supplier Presentations (via MS Teams)** | *October 18th – 22nd 2021* |
| **Select Supplier to Award Business** | *1st week of November 2021* |
| **Estimated Contract Start Date** | *2nd week of November 2021* |
| **Implementation Timeline** | *TBD by IRC and Provider(s)* |

* 1. ***Clarification and Questions***

A prospective Bidder with outstanding questions related to this RFP packet of the Bidding Documents may notify **Shirley Rodriguez at Shirley**[**.Rodriguez@rescue.org**](mailto:.Rodriguez@rescue.org)and **Todd Veneziano at** [Todd.Veneziano@rescue.org](mailto:Todd.Veneziano@rescue.org) and **Ariana Schrier** at [Ariana.Schrier@rescue.org](mailto:Ariana.Schrier@rescue.org)

## Submission of Bids:

Bidder shall submit bids via email to **Shirley Rodriguez at** [**Shirley.rodriguez@rescue.org**](mailto:Shirley.rodriguez@rescue.org) and **Todd Veneziano at** [**todd.veneziano@rescue.org**](mailto:todd.veneziano@rescue.org)and **Ariana Schrier** at [**Ariana.Schrier@rescue.org**](mailto:Ariana.Schrier@rescue.org)no later than **October 11th, 2021**.

## Format

The proposal shall consist of a profile of the company in a power point/PDF presentation alongside a proposed scope of software / services in either excel or word format which will be shared with the project team. Provider will need to also provide all documents requested including financial documents and references.

## Evaluation and Comparison of Bids

Proposals will be scored based on the evaluation criteria listed in the table below. Each evaluation criteria will be assigned a certain number of points based on the importance to the procurement review committee. Proposals should address each evaluation criteria.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **EVALUATION CRITERIA** | **Description** | **Weight (%)** |
| **User Experience & Technical Platform** | * Bidder has the ability to demonstrate relevant prior experience and knowledge of the services required, overall fit, and experience working with NGOs. * Articulated approach to assessing and addressing user needs and behaviors * Ability to accommodate a variety of users, technical & functional requirements, and varied use cases | 25% |
| **Implementation Timeline** | Proposal meets required timeline expectations. If there are concerns with this timeline the proposal should provide alternate scenarios/options but should not deter from proposal submission. | 20% |
| **Commercial Model & Price Structure** | * Creates a deliverables-based commercial model, with transparent cost structure that demonstrates initial investment and long term maintenance. * Costs are competitive, and fully capture the scope outlined by the team, without the need for additional hours or consulting beyond standard enhancements or maintenance. | 30% |
| **Customer Support** | Provider has clear support model including dedicated customer service representatives available by phone, email, or chat. Provider has ticket system to track service requests and clearly defined SLA’s with an escalation route, if needed. | 25% |
| **TOTAL** |  | **100%** |

**AWARD TERMS AND CONDITIONS**

## Contract award and notification

Procurement and the IT Team will award the Contract to the notified successful Bidder(s) whose bid has been determined as the best evaluated bid considering price/performance factors, provided further that the Bidder is determined to be qualified to enter into an MSA.

## Disclaimer

*Procurement reserves the right to alter the dates of the timetable. Procurement does not bind itself to accept the lowest or any proposal.*

# Ethical Operating Standards

The IRC Way: Standards for Professional Conduct (“The IRC Way”), the IRC’s code of conduct, and IRC’s Combating Trafficking in Persons Policy. The IRC Way provides three

(3) core values - Integrity, Service, and Accountability – and twenty-two (22) specific undertakings.

The IRC Way provides, inter alia, that IRC does “not engage in theft, corrupt practices, nepotism, bribery, or trade in illicit substances.” IRC’s procurement systems and policies are designed to maximize transparency and minimize the risk of corruption in IRC’s operations.

IRC requests that a supplier (i) informs IRC upon becoming aware that the integrity of IRC’s business has been compromised during the RFP process, and (ii) report such events through IRC’s confidential hotline, Ethics point, which can be accessed at [www.ethicspoint.com](http://www.ethicspoint.com/) or via toll–free (866) 654–6461 in the U.S., or collect (503) 352– 8177 outside the U.S.