



REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

CAMPUS DINING SERVICES

RFI No. USAO-DINING-RFI-2026-01

Issuing Institution	University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma (USAO)
Document Title	Request for Information — Dining Services
RFI Number	USAO-DINING-RFI-2026-01
Issue Date	April 7, 2026
Response Deadline	May 6, 2026, at 5:00 PM CDT
Issuing Office	Business Office
Contact Person	David Smith, Executive Director of Operations & Controller
Contact Email	Dsmith2@usao.edu
Contact Phone	(405)-574-1211
Submission Method	Electronic submission via https://usao.edu/vendors/index.html

IMPORTANT NOTICE

This document constitutes a Request for Information (RFI) only and does not represent a commitment by the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma to issue a Request for Proposals (RFP), award a contract, or pay any costs incurred in the preparation of a response. USAO is not obligated to notify respondents of the results of this RFI. Responses will be used solely for market research and planning purposes.

SECTION 1 — INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Purpose of This Request for Information

The University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma (USAO) is issuing this Request for Information (RFI) to solicit information from qualified dining service providers regarding their capabilities, service models, pricing structures, and relevant experience in collegiate dining operations. The purpose of this RFI is to conduct market research to inform USAO's future procurement planning for campus dining services.

USAO is not soliciting proposals at this time. Responses to this RFI will be used to assess the market landscape, evaluate the feasibility of a competitive procurement process, and identify providers who may be invited to respond to a future Request for Proposals (RFP) should the University elect to proceed.

1.2 Institutional Overview

The University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma is Oklahoma's only public liberal arts university, accredited by the Higher Learning Commission. USAO is located in Chickasha, Oklahoma, in Grady County, approximately 40 miles southwest of Oklahoma City. The University serves approximately 900–1,000 undergraduate students and maintains one of the highest residential participation rates among Oklahoma colleges and universities, reflecting its strong residential identity and close-knit campus community.

USAO currently operates approximately 594 on-campus beds across traditional residence halls (Rogers Hall and Troutt Hall) and apartment-style units at Lawson Court. Effective January 2027, the University will open a new 166-bed residential facility, bringing total on-campus bed capacity to approximately 760 beds. The University's current residential enrollment goal is approximately 600 students, representing a residential occupancy rate of approximately 79% of current capacity — a figure that will grow as the new facility comes online and residential recruitment efforts mature. Prospective dining service providers should plan for a residential dining population consistent with this trajectory and account for the associated growth in meal plan participation when developing their responses.

Additional institutional characteristics relevant to a dining services provider include:

- **Academic calendar:** Two 15-week semesters (fall and spring) with limited summer session activity
- **Current dining facilities:** Student Center dining hall (primary cafeteria), Dusty's quick-serve concept, C-Store convenience retail, and The Daily Grind/Starbucks-licensed café at Lawson Court Clubhouse
- **Current meal plan structure:** Weekly swipe plans (5, 12, 14, and 19 meals/week) and block plans (10, 25, and 50 meals/semester), with flex dollar components on weekly plans
- **Current dining contract:** USAO currently has a dining services agreement in place; prospective respondents should be aware that any future procurement would be subject to the terms and timeline of the existing contract

1.3 Objectives

Through this RFI process, USAO seeks to:

1. Understand the range of dining service models available in the collegiate market, including self-operated, fully outsourced, and hybrid models
2. Gather information on current pricing structures, cost per meal benchmarks, and meal plan design options relative to comparable Oklahoma institutions
3. Identify providers with demonstrated experience serving small, residential liberal arts institutions with enrollments of 500–2,000 students
4. Assess the potential for enhanced student dining satisfaction, improved meal plan value, and expanded food service offerings
5. Evaluate the capital investment capacity and technology capabilities of prospective providers
6. Inform the development of scope-of-work specifications should USAO proceed to a formal RFP
7. USAO is conducting a comprehensive evaluation of all viable dining service operational models, including fully outsourced contract management, self-operated dining, and hybrid arrangements that combine institutional management with select contracted services. Responses from firms specializing in self-operation feasibility assessment, dining program management consulting, and operational transition planning are expressly welcomed and will be evaluated alongside responses from traditional contract dining service providers.

SECTION 2 — SCOPE OF POTENTIAL SERVICES

2.1 Core Dining Operations

A dining services provider at USAO would be expected to manage some or all of the following:

- Full management and staffing of residential dining operations, including the primary cafeteria, retail concepts, and convenience store
- Design and administration of residential meal plan programs, including weekly, block, and declining-balance options
- Catering services for campus events, athletic functions, university-hosted conferences, and student organization activities
- Management of the campus Starbucks-licensed or equivalent cafe concept at Lawson Court
- Retail food and beverage operations, including C-Store management and branded concept development
- Compliance with all applicable health, safety, and food service regulations at the local, state, and federal levels

2.2 Additional Service Areas of Interest

USAO is interested in understanding provider capabilities in the following areas:

- Nutrition and allergen transparency — digital and physical menu labeling, dietary accommodation protocols (vegan, gluten-free, kosher, halal)
- Sustainable and local sourcing initiatives — farm-to-table programs, food waste reduction, tray-less dining, composting
- Student engagement and satisfaction measurement — dining advisory committees, regular satisfaction surveys, responsive menu development
- Technology integration — mobile ordering, contactless payment, meal plan management apps, point-of-sale systems compatible with existing student ID infrastructure
- Financial transparency — open-book accounting, detailed cost reporting, and audit rights for the University
- Summer operations — scaled dining options for summer conferences, camps, and enrolled summer students

2.3 Self-Operation as an Evaluated Alternative

- In addition to fully outsourced dining service models, USAO is interested in receiving information from qualified consulting firms with demonstrated experience assisting small residential colleges and universities in evaluating the feasibility of self-operated dining programs. At the conclusion of its current dining services arrangement, USAO may wish to consider whether a self-operated or hybrid model could deliver improved meal plan value, greater institutional control over food quality and sourcing, and enhanced alignment with the University's liberal arts mission. Consulting firms responding to this section should address their experience conducting dining feasibility studies, developing pro forma financial models for self-operated programs, advising staffing structures and HR transitions, and providing ongoing management support during and after an operational transition. USAO makes no commitment at this time to pursue any service model.

SECTION 3 — INFORMATION REQUESTED FROM RESPONDENTS

USAO requests that respondents provide information addressing each of the following areas. Responses need not be exhaustive; the University is seeking sufficient information to assess market capabilities and provider fit. Respondents are encouraged to be candid about their strengths and the types of institutions they serve most effectively.

3.1 Company Profile and Qualifications

- Full legal name of the company, headquarters location, and organizational structure (parent company, subsidiaries, regional offices)
- Number of years in collegiate dining operations and total number of current higher education accounts
- Number of accounts currently served in Oklahoma and the surrounding region (Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri, Texas)
- Three to five references from comparable institutions — defined as residential liberal arts colleges or small regional universities with enrollment under 2,000 students — including contact information for each
- Any pending or recent litigation, regulatory actions, or material contract terminations within the past five years related to dining service operations

3.2 Service Model and Approach

- Describe your standard service model for a residential institution of USAO's size and type. How do you typically structure management staffing, culinary leadership, and support functions?
- Describe your approach to meal plan design. What plan structures do you recommend for small residential campuses, and what does your data show regarding student plan utilization and satisfaction at comparable accounts?
- How do you handle the seasonality of a two-semester academic calendar, including summer operations and periods of low residential occupancy?
- Describe your catering capabilities and how catering revenue is structured and shared with the institution
- Provide an overview of your branded concept portfolio (e.g., licensed quick-serve concepts, proprietary retail brands) and your experience deploying those concepts at small campuses

3.3 Pricing and Financial Structure

USAO is interested in understanding typical financial arrangements, not binding pricing commitments. Please address:

- Describe your general fee or commission structure for dining contracts at institutions of USAO's size. Do you operate on a management fee model, commission/profit-sharing model, or another arrangement?
- What capital investment or equipment contribution would you typically offer for a new contract at a campus of this type? Describe how capital commitments are structured and amortized over contract terms
- What is your typical contract length, and what renewal or renegotiation provisions do you build into standard agreements?
- Describe any revenue guarantee structures you offer or require from the institution
- What cost-per-meal benchmarks are typical at comparable accounts? How do your current clients' per-meal costs compare to regional and national averages?
- Describe your approach to annual price adjustments — what indices or escalators are typically used (e.g., CPI, HEPI, food cost indices)?

3.4 Technology and Systems

- What point-of-sale (POS) and meal plan management systems do you currently use? Are these systems compatible with TouchNet Information Systems and Ellucian Colleague, USAO's ERP platform?
- Describe your mobile ordering and contactless payment capabilities
- What data and reporting do you provide to institutional clients — frequency, format, and level of detail?
- Describe your nutrition and allergen labeling technology — how is menu information communicated to students digitally and in person?

3.5 Workforce and Human Resources

- How do you typically handle staffing transitions when assuming a new contract? Would you expect to retain existing dining staff, and what is your standard approach to wages and benefits?
- Describe your training programs for dining staff, culinary teams, and management personnel
- Do you carry workers' compensation, general liability, and professional liability insurance? Please identify coverage minimums you typically carry.

3.6 Sustainability and Community Engagement

- Describe your sustainability programs — local and regional sourcing commitments, food waste reduction metrics, and any certifications held (e.g., LEED, Green Restaurant, Real Food Challenge).
- How do you engage students in menu planning, dining concept development, and ongoing satisfaction improvement?
- Describe any programs you offer to address food insecurity among students.

SECTION 4 — SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

4.1 How to Respond

Interested providers are invited to submit a written response to this RFI electronically via email to the contact person identified on the cover page of this document. Responses should be submitted in PDF or Microsoft Word format. There is no prescribed format or page limit; however, USAO encourages concise, organized responses that directly address the information requested in Section 3.

4.2 Deadline

Responses must be received no later than May 6, 2026 at 5:00 PM Central Daylight Time. Responses received after this deadline may not be considered. USAO reserves the right to extend the response deadline at its sole discretion.

4.3 Questions

Questions regarding this RFI should be submitted in writing via email to the contact person identified on the cover page. Questions and responses of general interest will be shared with all known prospective respondents in a written addendum issued no later than April 22, 2026. Respondents should not contact other USAO staff or officials regarding this RFI.

4.4 Confidentiality

USAO will treat responses to this RFI as confidential to the extent permitted by the Oklahoma Open Records Act (51 O.S. § 24A.1 et seq.). Respondents who believe that specific portions of their response contain proprietary or trade secret information should clearly identify those portions and the basis for confidentiality. USAO makes no guarantee that any information identified as confidential will be protected from disclosure if a public records request is received.

4.5 No Obligation

This RFI does not obligate USAO to issue a Request for Proposals, enter into a contract, or take any other procurement action. The University reserves the right to cancel this RFI at any time without notice or obligation. USAO will not reimburse any costs associated with the preparation or submission of a response to this RFI.

SECTION 5 — EVALUATION AND NEXT STEPS

5.1 Use of RFI Responses

Information gathered through this RFI will be used internally by USAO to:

- Assess the depth and competitiveness of the dining services market for institutions of USAO's size and type
- Identify the range of service models, pricing structures, and contract terms currently available
- Benchmark USAO's current dining program against market alternatives
- Develop specifications, evaluation criteria, and scope-of-work language should the University proceed to a formal competitive procurement

5.2 Anticipated Timeline

The following represents a preliminary planning timeline. Dates are subject to change and no commitment is made to any specific procurement action.

Milestone	Target Date
RFI Issued	April 7, 2026
Questions from Respondents Due	April 17, 2026
USAO Responses to Questions Issued	April 22, 2026
RFI Response Deadline	May 6, 2026
Internal Review of RFI Responses Complete	May 20, 2026
Decision on RFP Issuance	May 27, 2026
RFP Issued (if applicable)	June 3, 2026
Anticipated Contract Award (if applicable)	September 10, 2026
Anticipated Transition / Start Date	December 16, 2026

5.3 Respondent Briefings

USAO may, at its discretion, invite selected respondents to participate in informational briefings or site visits following review of RFI responses. Participation in any such briefings does not confer any preference or advantage in a subsequent procurement process. All costs associated with briefings or site visits are the sole responsibility of the respondent.

SECTION 6 — TERMS AND CONDITIONS

By submitting a response to this RFI, the respondent acknowledges and agrees to the following:

8. The response is submitted voluntarily, at the respondent's sole expense, and without expectation of compensation or contract award.
9. All information provided in the response is accurate and truthful to the best of the respondent's knowledge.
10. USAO may use information contained in the response for internal planning, market research, or development of a formal procurement document.
11. The respondent grants USAO a non-exclusive, royalty-free license to reproduce and distribute the response for internal use.
12. Submission of a response does not create a contractual relationship of any kind between the respondent and USAO.
13. USAO is a state institution subject to the Oklahoma State Finance Act, the Oklahoma Competitive Bidding Act (61 O.S. § 101 et seq.), applicable Board of Regents for Oklahoma Colleges (BROC) policies, and all other applicable state and federal laws governing public procurement.
14. Any contract ultimately resulting from a formal procurement process will be subject to Oklahoma state law, venue in Grady County, Oklahoma, and approval by the USAO Board of Regents as required.

SECTION 7 — CERTIFICATION AND SUBMISSION

Respondents are requested to include the following certification with their submission:

RESPONDENT CERTIFICATION

The undersigned, being duly authorized to act on behalf of the responding organization, certifies that the information contained in this RFI response is accurate and complete to the best of the respondent's knowledge, and that the responding organization understands and accepts the terms stated in this Request for Information.

Organization Name: _____

Authorized Representative Name: _____

Title: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

— END OF REQUEST FOR INFORMATION —

University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma | 1727 W. Alabama Ave., Chickasha, OK 73018 | usao.edu