Request for Proposals

for

TECHNOLOGY SERVICES, INCLUDING E-RATE ELIGIBLE CATEGORY TWO SERVICES: ROUTER REPLACEMENT

Funding Year 2027 FCC Form 470 # 270002974
Posted: November 16, 2026

Please note that Acero issued a separate Form 470 and RFP for Category One services

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Issued on November 16, 2026

Proposal Due Date: 4:00 PM CST on December 22, 2026

Acero Charter Schools, Inc.
18 S. Michigan Ave, 9th Floor
Chicago, Illinois 60603
bidresponse@aceroschools.org

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	ABOUT ACERO SCHOOLS	3
II.	OVERVIEW OF THIS REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS	3
III.	TIMELINE	4
IV.	DESCRIPTION OF SERVICES	5
V.	EVALUATION PROCEDURE & CRITERIA	12
VI.	FORMAT FOR PROPOSAL	14
VII.	SUBMITTING PROPOSALS	16
	A. Proposal Due Date, Time, and Submission Address	16
	B. Questions and Answers	16
	C. Addenda	16
	D. Contact Information	16
VIII.	GENERAL RULES AND GUIDELINES	17
IX.	TABLE OF EXHIBITS	21
X.	AUTHORITY AND SIGNATURE	22

Conflict of Interest Certification	*Exhibit A*
Pricing Form	*Exhibit B*
2026-2027 Acero School Locations	*Exhibit C*

I. ABOUT ACERO SCHOOLS

Acero Charter Schools, Inc. ("Acero") is an over 20-year-old urban, tuition-free public charter school network serving a high percentage of bilingual students. Since 1998, we have served more than 19,000 Chicago students.

Acero, which means structural steel in Spanish, signifies the endurance and strength of our community of students, alumni, parents and educators.

Acero takes a team-based approach to developing high performing schools through innovation and sharing best practices. Using proven educational models that foster social emotional learning, personalized instruction and data-driven and differentiated teaching, we devise a customized approach for each of our schools to best meet the needs of individual students and families.

II. OVERVIEW OF THIS REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

In accordance with Acero Schools' procurement policy and rules, Acero Schools invites your company ("Company", "Company", "you", or "your") to participate in this Request for Proposals ("RFP") seeking Category Two E-Rate funded router replacement services, inclusive of Wide Area Network (WAN) edge routers, interface expansion cards, transceivers, software licensing, and professional implementation services. Qualified companies interested in this Request for Proposal (RFP) are invited to submit proposals based on the Federal Communication Commission's Schools and Libraries Division ("SLD", "E-Rate") program rules to support economically disadvantaged rural and urban schools and libraries. The resulting contract(s) and services will begin on April 1, 2027, in accordance with E-Rate's Funding Year 2027. Further details are listed below in Section IV and in the attached Exhibits.

Acero has participated in the E-Rate program since 2006. Acero wishes to maintain industry standards for its robust infrastructure that requires complex support and services in E-Rate Category One and Category Two.

Please note that Acero issued a separate Form 470 & RFP for Category One services.

III. TIMELINE

Companies will be expected to comply with the following dates and deadlines. Acero reserves the right to reject any Proposal received after the Proposal Due Date.

RFP Timeline	Date
FCC Form 470 # 270002974 posted	November 16, 2026
RFP Issued ("Issue Date") & Quiet Period Begins	November 16, 2026
Q&A Period Closes and Deadline to Submit Questions to bidresponse@aceroschools.org	5pm CST, November 22, 2026
Acero issues written answers to Questions	November 23, 2026
Company's Proposals Due ("Proposal Due Date")	4pm CST, December 22, 2026
Anticipated Award Date	Early February 2027

IV. DESCRIPTION OF SERVICES

Acero seeks to procure Category Two E-Rate funded router replacement services, inclusive of Wide Area Network (WAN) edge routers, interface expansion cards, transceivers, software licensing, and professional implementation services ("Services"). The following section describes the Services to be performed by the selected Company(s). Further details on the evaluation of Proposals, preparing Proposals in response to this RFP, and conditions of submitting a Proposal can be found in Sections IV through VII of this RFP, as well as in the attached Exhibits. Companies are encouraged to thoroughly read these materials **in their entirety** before submitting a Proposal.

The establishing FCC Form 470 number is # 270002974. Companies are required to participate and be in full compliance with all current and future requirements issued by the Schools and Libraries Division of the Universal Service Corporation ("SLD") for participation in the E-Rate Program.

Acero seeks to award a contract to the Company(s) selected as the highest evaluated Proposal. This RFP, any Addendum, and your Proposal will be incorporated into an agreement upon contract award. The resulting contract(s) and services will begin on April 1, 2027, in accordance with E-Rate's Funding Year 2027.

Please note that Acero issued a separate Form 470 & RFP for Category One services.

CATEGORY TWO SERVICES AND DELIVERABLES: ROUTER REPLACEMENT - TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS AND SCOPE OF WORK

A. Overview and Strategic Objectives

Acero is issuing this RFP to procure E-Rate Category 2 eligible Wide Area Network (WAN) edge routers, interface expansion cards, transceivers, software licensing, and professional implementation services. Acero has standardized its network core on Cisco Systems and seeks to replace legacy network equipment with Cisco Catalyst 8000 Series Edge Platforms or functional equivalents.

The objective of this procurement is to deploy a high-availability, high-throughput WAN overlay connecting six physical school branch campuses representing eight active K-12 schools to the Acero central network facility. The WAN architecture incorporates dual-circuit connectivity per branch site, consisting of a primary private WAN link and a secondary Direct Internet Access (DIA) circuit. Under normal operation, internet traffic is backhauled over the primary WAN overlay to the Data Center core facility for centralized firewalling and security processing. In the event of primary WAN degradation or failure, the edge routers must support automated failover and dynamic local breakout over the DIA circuit while maintaining strict CIPA-compliant web and DNS security filtering.

While Acero permits bids for functional equivalent platforms to ensure fair and open competition, any proposal offering a non-Cisco platform must represent a complete, turnkey solution. Bidders proposing alternative platforms must include and itemize in their price proposal all controller infrastructure, software licensing, configuration migration engineering, and administrative training required to transition Acero from its existing Cisco SD-WAN controller environment to the proposed ecosystem. Acero will not be liable for any transition or integration costs omitted from the vendor's proposal.

All proposed equipment, expansion modules, transceivers, software licenses, and configurations must support full production line-rate performance under live workloads, including AES-256 IPsec encryption, Quality of Service (QoS), Deep Packet Inspection (DPI), stateful firewalling, dynamic multi-path application steering, and multi-VRF segmentation.

Funding and Project Execution Disclaimer: Proposals submitted in response to this RFP do not constitute a binding contract. Project scheduling, site sequencing, and final hardware quantities are contingent upon USAC E-Rate funding approval and Acero budgetary allocations. Acero reserves the right to adjust site counts, modify hardware quantities, or defer specific locations pending final funding determinations.

B. Deployment Locations and Site Breakdown

The scope of this project covers two Data Center hub routers co-located at the Acero central network facility and six physical school branch site locations servicing eight active school programs.

1. **Data Center Core Network Facility (2 Core Hub Routers Total)**
    - **Primary Network Data Center:** 216 W. Jackson Blvd., Chicago, IL 60606
2. **Active School Branch Site Campuses (6 Physical Sites, 6 Edge Routers Total)**
    - **Acero Brighton Park Elementary School:** 4420 S. Fairfield Ave., Chicago, IL 60632 (1 Edge Router)
    - **Acero Roberto Clemente Elementary School:** 2050 N. Natchez Ave., Chicago, IL 60707 (1 Edge Router)
    - **Acero Jovita Idar Elementary School:** 5050 S. Homan Ave., Chicago, IL 60632 (1 Edge Router)
    - **Acero Officer Donald J. Marquez Elementary School:** 2916 W. 47th St., Chicago, IL 60632 (1 Edge Router)
    - **Acero Victoria Soto High School:** 5025 S. St. Louis Ave., Chicago, IL 60632 (1 Edge Router)
    - **Veterans Memorial Campus (VMC):** 4248 W. 47th St., Chicago, IL 60632 (1 Edge Router total). *Note: This single physical campus location houses three distinct schools across three floors, including Acero Major Hector P. Garcia M.D. High School on the 3rd floor, Acero PFC Omar E. Torres Elementary School on the 2nd floor, and Acero SPC Daniel Zizumbo Elementary School on the 1st floor. Only one shared branch edge router is required for the entire VMC campus facility.*

C. Hardware, Interface Expansion Modules, and Transceiver Specifications

Companies must quote exact or functional equivalent Cisco Catalyst 8000 series hardware, interface expansion cards, optical modules, and patch cabling meeting or exceeding the technical baselines below. Refurbished, remanufactured, or gray-market equipment is strictly prohibited.

1. **Data Center Hub Edge Platforms (Quantity: 2)**
    - **Target Platform:** Cisco Catalyst 8500-12X or functional equivalent.
    - **Installation Site:** 216 W. Jackson Blvd., Chicago, IL 60606.
    - **Throughput Baseline:** Minimum 10 Gbps encrypted SD-WAN IPsec throughput under an IMIX traffic profile.
    - **Interface Density:** Integrated minimum density of 12 10G/1G SFP+ optical ports.
    - **Resilience and Power:** Dual hot-swappable AC power supplies and dedicated hardware acceleration (Cisco Quantum Flow Processor ASIC or functional equivalent).
    - **Transceiver Allocation per Device:** Four (4) SFP-10G-T-X or functional equivalent 10GBASE-T copper modules, four (4) SFP-10G-SR or functional equivalent multimode optical transceivers, and four (4) 3-meter LC-to-LC OM4 duplex fiber patch cables (CAB-OM4-LC-LC-3M or functional equivalent).
2. **School Branch Edge Platforms (Quantity: 6)**
    - **Target Platform:** Cisco Catalyst 8300-1N1S-4T2X, Cisco Catalyst 8300-2N2S-4T2X, or functional equivalent.
    - **Installation Sites:** Six physical branch campus locations listed in Section B (including one router dedicated to the Veterans Memorial Campus).
    - **System Memory Requirement:** All proposed branch routers must be factory-equipped with a minimum of 16 GB DRAM (Cisco SKU: MEM-C8300-16GB or functional equivalent) to ensure system stability under active security processing.
    - **Throughput Baseline:** Minimum 5 Gbps encrypted SD-WAN IPsec throughput with active Quality of Service, Deep Packet Inspection, dynamic link management, and stateful firewall policies under an IMIX traffic profile.
    - **Onboard Interface Density:** Minimum two 10G SFP+ optical WAN/LAN ports and four 1G RJ-45 Ethernet ports on the chassis baseboard.
    - **Resilience and Power:** Dual redundant AC power supplies and onboard M.2 storage for local logging.
    - **Transceiver Allocation per Device:** Four (4) SFP-10G-T-X or functional equivalent 10GBASE-T copper modules, four (4) SFP-10G-SR or functional equivalent multimode optical transceivers, and four (4) 3-meter LC-to-LC OM4 duplex fiber patch cables (CAB-OM4-LC-LC-3M or functional equivalent).
3. **School Branch 10G Interface Expansion Modules (Quantity: 6)**
    - **Target Expansion Card:** Cisco 2-Port 10G SFP+ Network Interface Module (Cisco SKU: C-NIM-2X or functional equivalent).
    - **Installation Scope:** One C-NIM-2X or functionally equivalent expansion module populated into the open NIM slot of each proposed branch router (6 modules total).
    - **Functional Requirement:** Expands total native 10G SFP+ port capacity at each branch campus from two to four total 10G SFP+ interfaces. This supports simultaneous high-speed 10G connections for primary WAN circuits, secondary DIA circuits, local core switch trunking, and diagnostic connections.

4. **Consolidated Transceiver and Cabling Project Totals (8 Routers Total)**
    - **10GBASE-T Copper SFP+ Modules (Cisco SKU: SFP-10G-T-X or functional equivalent):** Quantity 32 total across project (4 per router).
    - **10GBASE-SR Multimode Optical Transceivers (Cisco SKU: SFP-10G-SR or functional equivalent):** Quantity 32 total across project (4 per router).
    - **Duplex Multimode Fiber Patch Cords (Cisco SKU: CAB-OM4-LC-LC-3M or functional equivalent):** Quantity 32 total across project (4 per router).

D. Mandatory High-Security Encryption Licensing (HSECK9 or Equivalent)

To ensure that all edge routers operate without throughput restrictions, Company must explicitly include the Cisco HSECK9 High Security Export License or functional equivalent un-throttling license on 100 percent of proposed hardware units. Proposals that omit the HSECK9 or functional equivalent license, resulting in devices being restricted to low-throughput encrypted processing (such as 250 Mbps), will be deemed non-responsive and rejected.

E. Software, Management Architecture, Security Integration, and Segmentation

1. **Centralized Management Platform and Turnkey Cost Itemization:**
    - Acero operates an established Cisco Cloud-Hosted SD-WAN Controller environment (Cisco Catalyst SD-WAN Cloud Fabric). All proposed edge routers must natively integrate with Acero's existing Cisco Catalyst SD-WAN Manager tenant (unless providing alternative platforms- see below.)
    - **Turnkey Scope and Cost Itemization for Alternative Platforms:** Third-party edge platforms cannot natively join or be managed by Cisco SD-WAN controllers. Therefore, any vendor proposing a non-Cisco platform must propose a complete, turnkey management ecosystem. The proposing vendor must include and explicitly itemize in *Exhibit B* all replacement controller infrastructure, cloud management subscriptions, transition software licensing, full configuration migration engineering, cutover labor, and staff training required to achieve operational parity.
    - **Rejection of Incomplete Proposals:** All costs associated with deploying and migrating to an alternative controller ecosystem must be included in Exhibit B so that Acero can evaluate the true Total Cost of Ownership on an apples-to-apples basis. Proposals for non-Cisco platforms that omit required controller infrastructure, licensing, or migration services will be deemed incomplete and non-responsive.
2. **Functional Equivalent Cloud SD-WAN Controller Capabilities:** To be deemed functionally equivalent to Acero's established Cisco Cloud-Hosted SD-WAN Controller environment, any proposed non-Cisco management platform must deliver equivalent feature parity, control plane functionality, orchestration, and security management. Proposals featuring alternative SD-WAN controller solutions must demonstrate that their cloud management fabric natively fulfills all of the following functional capabilities:
    - **Cloud-Hosted Orchestration and Zero-Touch Provisioning (ZTP):** Secure automated discovery, authentication, and provisioning of remote branch and data center edge routers via hardware serial number, pre-staged cloud portal matching, and enterprise PKI and digital certificate verification without local manual CLI intervention. Orchestration services must facilitate NAT traversal across dual WAN links (private WAN and local DIA) and orchestrate secure control plane connections across disparate

transport providers within a cloud-hosted controller architecture providing multi-region redundancy, dynamic failover, and active-active controller synchronization with guaranteed 99.99 percent uptime SLAs.

- **Centralized Control Plane and Dynamic Routing Policy Engine:** A centralized control engine that calculates routing paths, enforces policy, and distributes overlay routing tables to edge routers via a secure control protocol without requiring full-mesh control plane peering between edge devices. Must provide continuous real-time monitoring of packet loss, latency, and jitter across all transport links using active probing (such as BFD or equivalent) with sub-second automated failover from primary backhauled WAN overlay tunnels to local secondary Direct Internet Access (DIA) interfaces during circuit degradation.
- **Centralized Single Pane of Glass Management:** Centralized GUI platform supporting feature-based configuration templates, policy creation, global parameter enforcement, multi-VRF network segmentation, and 802.1Q VLAN mapping across all locations. Must support centralized scheduled deployment of software updates, patches, and firmware upgrades with automated rollback protections, as well as real-time telemetry, bandwidth consumption tracking, link health metrics, and audit logging.
- **Integrated Cloud Security and CIPA Enforcement:** Centralized orchestration of secure DNS redirection connectors to enforce Cloud-Hosted DNS security and CIPA web filtering policies directly at the branch edge router during local DIA breakout, alongside unified policy creation for application-aware stateful firewall rules, Deep Packet Inspection (DPI), and dynamic automated distribution and rotation of AES-256 IPsec encryption keys.

3. **Account Provisioning:**
   - If bidding Cisco equipment or compatible SKUs, all proposed hardware and software subscription SKUs must be assigned directly to the Acero designated Cisco Smart Account and Virtual Account upon order placement.
   - Vendors submitting alternative non-Cisco platforms must detail account provisioning and administrative portal handoff within their response.
4. **SD-WAN Subscription Licensing:**
   - Proposals must include a 5-year Cisco Catalyst SD-WAN Advantage subscription license (or functional equivalent) for every deployed router.
   - Subscriptions must cover cloud controller management, centralized policy creation, dynamic multi-path application steering, real-time visibility, automated WAN and DIA failover control, and 24x7x4 Technical Assistance Center (TAC) software and hardware support.

5. **Dual-WAN Link Steering, DIA Failover, and Cloud Security Integration:**
    - **WAN Egress Topology:** Each school branch campus will be connected via a primary WAN transport circuit and a secondary Direct Internet Access (DIA) circuit. Under standard operating conditions, default internet traffic from branch users is encapsulated and backhauled over the secure SD-WAN IPsec overlay to the Data Center core network facility for centralized security inspection and firewall egress.
    - **Automated DIA Failover and Dynamic Breakout:** The proposed SD-WAN solution must continuously monitor circuit quality (latency, packet loss, jitter). In the event of primary WAN link outage or threshold degradation, the router must automatically fail over to the secondary DIA circuit and support direct local internet breakout to preserve application performance.
    - **CIPA-Compliant Web and DNS Filtering:** Acero maintains active Cisco Umbrella licensing for cloud security and CIPA compliance. Bidders shall NOT include additional Umbrella or cloud security subscription licenses in their pricing. The awarded vendor must configure the native Cisco Umbrella DNS Connector on all branch routers within Acero's existing Cisco SD-WAN Manager if bidding Cisco solution. If an alternative platform is proposed, the vendor must demonstrate and configure seamless integration with Acero's existing Cisco Umbrella tenant during local DIA breakout, and include any required connector licensing or integration engineering in *Exhibit B*.
6. **Network Segmentation:** Equipment and software must natively support 802.1Q VLAN mapping and Virtual Routing and Forwarding (VRF) WAN overlay isolation.

F. Professional Implementation Services Scope

All physical installations, racking, patching, and cutovers are targeted for execution during the Acero summer maintenance window between June 14 and August 14, 2027.

Project Timeline and Scheduling Flexibility: Work scheduling is contingent upon USAC Form 471 approval and Funding Commitment Decision Letter (FCDL) issuance. Equipment staging, cloud controller template creation, and firmware pre-configuration may commence as early as April 1, 2027, in accordance with USAC Category 2 rules. Acero reserves the right to adjust site sequencing, extend deployment deadlines, or reschedule cutover windows due to USAC funding delays, carrier circuit readiness, or manufacturer hardware lead times without financial penalty.

The awarded Company shall provide end-to-end professional implementation services including:

- **Architecture Review and Staging:** Review current WAN topology, IP schemes, carrier handoffs, and dual-WAN (Primary WAN and Local DIA) routing requirements. Pre-configure device templates, feature profiles, dynamic failover and path-selection rules, Cisco Umbrella integration templates, and gold-star Cisco IOS XE SD-WAN firmware in the Acero cloud controller tenant prior to field deployment. If an alternative non-Cisco platform is awarded, implementation services must include complete controller staging, system translation, template creation, and migration engineering.
- **On-Site Installation and Optics Provisioning:** Unpack, rack-mount, install provided C-NIM-2X or functional equivalent expansion modules, 10GBASE-T copper transceivers, and 10GBASE-SR fiber optics into designated SFP+ ports, patch fiber and copper uplinks, and connect dual power feeds at the data center location and six physical school branch campuses.

- **Turn-Up and Cutover:** Execute seamless WAN and DIA cutovers outside of normal administrative hours. Validate dynamic IPsec overlay tunnel establishment to both Data Center hub routers over primary WAN circuits, as well as secondary DIA interface operation.
- **Testing and Verification:** Conduct active WAN-to-DIA failover validation, dynamic path selection testing, traffic-shaping verification, Cisco Umbrella DNS redirection verification, and 10G optical and copper link signal testing.
- **As-Built Documentation and Handoff:** Provide final as-built network topology diagrams, IP, VLAN, and VRF mapping spreadsheets, serial and MAC inventory tracking logs including transceiver serial numbers, controller template backups, and a minimum four-hour hands-on administrative training session for Acero IT personnel.

G. E-Rate Compliance and Exhibit B Pricing Rules

Company must strictly adhere to USAC E-Rate Category 2 guidelines when submitting pricing in *Exhibit B Pricing Form* (Product List / Price Proposal):

- **Itemized Allocation:** Pricing must explicitly separate costs into Hardware (including transceivers, expansion cards, RAM upgrades, and cables), Software/Subscriptions, and Professional Services on an itemized basis.
- **Platform Migration and Total Cost Itemization:** If proposing an alternative non-Cisco platform, the vendor must explicitly add line items to Exhibit B for all replacement controller software, controller hardware or cloud hosting, migration engineering services, and system retraining. Omitting platform migration costs will result in bid disqualification.
- **Cost Allocation of Ineligible Components:** Any software capability, cloud security add-on, or extended warranty feature that is ineligible under E-Rate Category 2 rules must be cost-allocated off the primary request and listed on a separate line item.
    - *Items with eligible and ineligible components:* Indicate the eligible percentage in the pricing sheet eligible percentage column.
    - *Fully ineligible components:* These may be added to the pricing sheet, with each listed as a separate line item.
- **Submission Format:** Pricing must be entered into the Unit Cost column and E-Rate eligibility percentages must be included in the appropriate columns of the provided spreadsheet attached as Exhibit B Pricing Form (Product List / Price Proposal). The pricing form must be returned as an unencrypted Microsoft Excel document alongside the proposal.

"Or Equivalent" Bids

To be considered, the Company must:

1. Clearly state "OR EQUIVALENT BID" on their proposal cover.
2. Submit a line-by-line compliance matrix (spreadsheet) detailing how their proposed model meets or *exceeds* every single specification listed above.
3. Provide full manufacturer datasheets for all proposed "or equivalent" components.

Failure to provide this detailed matrix to identify “or equivalent” proposals may result in the bid being deemed non-responsive or incomplete.

Router Replacement Pricing Worksheet – *Exhibit B- Pricing Form*

The Router Replacement pricing worksheet *Exhibit B* may be found as an Excel spreadsheet on Acero's website at https://www.aceroschools.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=817086&type=d&pREC_ID=1201864 and is also attached to FCC Form 470# 270002974 in the E-Rate Productivity Center (EPC).

Please note that Acero issued a separate Form 470 & RFP for Category One services.

V. EVALUATION PROCEDURE & CRITERIA

Designated Acero staff will first assess the Company's compliance with the requirements of the form of the Proposal, including completeness and timeliness of submission (Stage 1). Any Proposal that is incomplete, fails to clearly communicate information upon which an evaluation can be based, or is missing key components necessary to fully evaluate the response may, at the sole discretion of Acero, be rejected from further consideration due to "non-responsiveness." If Acero finds that Company failed to provide information or if Acero is unable to clearly understand the information provided, Acero may reject the Proposal prior to evaluation or reflect the failure as part of the evaluation process. ***Acero is under no obligation to request clarification from Companies regarding Proposals.***

Acero will then evaluate the extent to which a Proposal meets the project requirements and technical specifications set forth in this RFP, in accordance with the criteria outlined below (Stage 2). Acero will consider the information Company supplies or does not supply, and the quality of that information when evaluating Company's Proposal.

Stages 1 and 2 Evaluation Framework and Scoring Matrix

Stage 1: Administrative Pass/Fail Screening

Proposals are evaluated on a Pass/Fail basis against mandatory compliance criteria. Proposals failing any item in Stage 1 are non-responsive and eliminated prior to financial and technical scoring.

1. **Active SPIN and SPAC Status:** Vendor holds an active USAC Service Provider Identification Number (SPIN) and has filed a current FCC Form 473 (Service Provider Annual Certification).
2. **Proposal Completeness:** Proposal includes all required narrative sections, signed certificates, and the mandatory unencrypted Microsoft Excel version of Exhibit B Pricing Form.
3. **Timeline and Terms Agreement:** Vendor explicitly agrees to all mandatory RFP terms, USAC Category 2 rules, and the mandatory summer cutover window (June 14 through August 14, 2027).

Stage 2: Weighted Evaluation Matrix (100 Points Total)

Evaluation Criteria	**Weight**
1. Cost of E-Rate Eligible Goods and Services	**35**
2. Total Cost of Ownership (TCO), Migration Expenses, and Ineligible Costs	**20**
3. Technical Architecture, Feature Parity, and Interoperability	**20**
4. Implementation Plan, Timeline, and Delivery Risk	**15**
5. Vendor Qualifications, K-12 Track Record, and Support SLAs	**10**
TOTAL	**100 points**

VI. FORMAT FOR PROPOSAL

You are encouraged to thoroughly read this RFP **in its entirety** before submitting a Proposal. Your Proposal must be submitted in accordance with the instructions in this RFP and must include all information and materials requested in this RFP. If your Proposal does not follow this format, or does not contain the information requested, Acero may reject your Proposal.

Your Proposal should be separated by clearly labeled sections in accordance with the sequence listed below:

1. Cover Letter & Executive Summary (Section #1)

You must submit a cover letter signed by an authorized representative who is capable of committing the Company to provide the Goods or Services described in this RFP. The cover letter should include:

a. A brief description of your company, including its legal name, location, principal place of business, and years in business;

b. Federal Tax ID;

c. Company's E-Rate Service Provider Identification Number (SPIN), and confirmation that the SPIN is active and in good standing with USAC.

d. The name and telephone number of the principal contact for negotiations; and

e. A brief summary which explains your understanding of Acero's intent and objectives, and how your Proposal would achieve these objectives. General information concerning your qualifications should be also included in the executive summary unless addressed in other tabs of the Proposal.

2. Evidence of Qualifications (Section #2)

To demonstrate qualification for performing the Work under this RFP, Companies must submit the following documents.

a. Business License/Authority to do Business in Illinois

b. Key Personnel and Organization
   - Provide the names of key individuals for this effort, as well as an organization chart representing project responsibilities.
   - Provide a list of current members of your board of directors, if applicable.
   - Provide the name of each individual or entity and their percentage of ownership.
   - Provide a list of personnel who would be assigned to the Acero account.

c. Company Financial Information
   - Provide financial information concerning the solvency of their businesses, including: Gross annual revenue; Cash flow statement; and, Number of employees currently employed.

- If Company is unable to provide financial information, state the reasons in Company's Proposal.

d. Past and Present Litigation
   - Please provide a statement listing legal actions over the last three (3) years (whether civil, criminal, or administrative and whether brought by government/regulatory agency or private individual) with regard to any material matter involving your business operations or use or development of a system or services.

e. References
   - Please provide a minimum of three (3) references to whom you provide services/products similar to those requested in this RFP. If possible, please include at least one reference from a charter school network, public educational institution, or not-for-profit organization.

f. Minority/Women/Persons with Disabilities Owned Business Enterprise Commitment
   - Acero Schools encourages the use of Companies that are owned by minorities, women, or persons with disabilities. When submitting a Proposal, Company should identify whether Company's firm holds a State of Illinois Business Enterprise Program (BEP) certification, or an equivalent designation from another state, and provide evidence of certification.

3. Completion of Conflict of Interest Certification (Section #3)

Company must include an executed *Exhibit A* – Conflict of Interest Certification.

4. Authority and Signature (Section #4)

Company must sign page 22 of this RFP, X. Authority and Signature.

5. Proposed Implementation of Services (Section #5)

Companies must provide a plan for implementing the Services described in this RFP. Company's comprehensive plan must address all Services requested and include an overall plan for the implementation of Services.

6. Completion of Pricing Form (Section #6)

Company must complete *Exhibit B – Pricing Form,* returned as an unencrypted Microsoft Excel document. Proposals that fail to include complete price information will be deemed non-responsive and rejected. Acero reserves the right to negotiate a final fixed price, terms, and conditions with the selected Company. Company is responsible for disclosing any additional charges, taxes, or fees, which Acero must pay, in a detailed list. The Excel version of the *Exhibit B – Pricing Form* can be downloaded from Acero's Procurement website at https://www.aceroschools.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=817086&type=d&pREC_ID=1201864 or attached to FCC Form 470# 270002974 in the E-Rate

Productivity Center (EPC).

Proposals should include both PDF and Excel versions of the Pricing Form.

VII. SUBMITTING PROPOSALS

A. Proposal Due Date, Time, and Submission Address

All Proposals **must be submitted by 4:00 PM (Central Standard Time) on December 22, 2026**. Proposals should be submitted **by email** to **bidresponse@aceroschools.org** and must be in PDF format (with the exception of the *Exhibit B* Pricing which should be in Excel as well). Please note that email attachments in excess of 25MB may be undeliverable so please confirm submission with the contacts above. Proposals may also be submitted **by mail or physical delivery** to: **Acero Charter Schools, Inc., Attn: Joshua Herzog, 18 S Michigan Ave, 9th Floor, Chicago, IL 60603**. Only Proposals ***received*** by the deadline will be considered.

Acero staff will not open Proposals until after the due date and time specified above.

Prior to the due date, Company may email modifications and withdrawals to **bidresponse@aceroschools.org**. Acero reserves the right to not consider Proposals, modifications, or withdrawals submitted after the due date and time.

B. Questions and Answers

All questions must be submitted in writing by email to **bidresponse@aceroschools.org** by or on **November 22, 2026**. Responses to all questions will be reduced to writing and posted as an addendum to this RFP on Acero's website at https://www.aceroschools.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=817086&type=d&pREC_ID=1201864 and attached to FCC Form 470# 270002974 in the E-Rate Productivity Center (EPC). Responses will be posted by 5 PM Central Standard Time on November 23, 2026.

C. Addenda

Company may download any future Addenda from Acero's website at https://www.aceroschools.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=817086&type=d&pREC_ID=1201864 or attached to FCC Form 470# 270002974 in the E-Rate Productivity Center (EPC). Companies are solely responsible for acquiring the necessary information and materials.

Under no circumstances shall the failure to obtain clarifications and/or Addenda relieve a Company from being bound by any additional terms and conditions in the clarifications and/or Addenda, or from considering additional information contained therein in preparing a Proposal. Furthermore, failure to obtain any clarification and/or addendum shall not be valid grounds for a protest against award(s) made under this RFP.

D. Contact Information

If you have a question, you should notify the Project Contact identified in this section. Do not discuss the solicitation or your Proposal, directly or indirectly, with any Acero officer, director or employee other than the Project Contact (see "Quiet Period"). Questions regarding this RFP

must be sent in writing via email to the Project Contact. Telephone calls regarding the solicitation are not permitted. The contact information is as follows:

Acero Project Contact:
Acero Charter Schools, Inc.
18 S. Michigan Ave., 9th Floor
Chicago, Illinois 60603
bidresponse@aceroschools.org

VIII. GENERAL RULES AND GUIDELINES

By submitting a Proposal in response to this RFP, you acknowledge and adhere to the following general rules and guidelines:

A. Quiet Period

Beginning on the Issue Date and ending with an Award Notice, a Quiet Period will exist to ensure that prospective Companies have equal access to information relevant to the RFP. Except as expressly permitted in this Section, all prospective Companies shall refrain from communicating with any Acero employee regarding any product or service related to this RFP, the status of this RFP, Acero's decision, or other questions related to the RFP process. Prospective Companies shall also refrain from providing meals, travel, hotel, or other gifts of value to any Acero employee or the Project Manager. This Quiet Period policy does not prevent an existing Company from communicating with Acero employees or the Project Manager in the ordinary course of providing services under an existing agreement, however discussions related to this RFP shall be avoided. A potential Company may be disqualified from consideration under the solicitation for a knowing violation of this Quiet Period policy.
All communications related to this RFP must be directed to the Project Contact listed above.

B. Proposal Firm Time

Your Proposal must remain firm for 60 days from opening (the "Proposal Firm Time").

C. Conflicts of Interest

Acero will consider any information, including information contained in Company's Proposal that may demonstrate a conflict or potential conflict of interest that might compromise Company's ability to successfully perform the proposed services or undermine the integrity of the competitive procurement process.

Acero's officers, directors, agents, employees and family members are prohibited from engaging in any activity or transaction that conflicts with or appears to conflict with the interests of the Organization. Accordingly, Companies must disclose any personal, professional or business relationship it has or had with Acero, any of its employees, its Board members, or family members of Acero employees or Directors that could give rise to, or appear to give rise to, a conflict of interest.

If any Company submitting a Proposal has provided any services to Acero in researching, consulting, advising, drafting or reviewing this solicitation or any other services related to the preparation of this solicitation, such Company will be disqualified from further consideration.

All Companies must certify that no such conflict exists in accordance with *Exhibit A*.

D. Compliance/Rescission of Resulting Contract

By submitting a Proposal, Company understands that the information furnished to Acero during the procurement process, including without limitation the disclosure of any conflicts of interest, certifications regarding communications with Acero relating to the Quiet Period, or certifications relating to Acero's ban on pre-solicitation assistance, is material to its decision to award the Selected Company a contract. Company agrees that any misstatement of fact or omission made or not made in responding to this RFP may be grounds for rescinding the resulting contract.

E. Freedom of Information Act

Any and all records and documentation relating to the Services provided pursuant to, or otherwise obtained in connection with this Agreement, including this Agreement, may be subject to public release under the Illinois Freedom of Information Act ("FOIA"), 5 ILCS 140/1 *et.seq*.

F. Confidentiality

Company may identify those portions of the Proposal that contain trade secrets or other proprietary data that must remain confidential. If a Company includes data that is not to be disclosed to the public for any purpose or used by Acero for anything other than evaluation purposes, the Company **must**:

1. Mark the title page as follows: "This RFP Proposal includes trade secrets or other proprietary data ("data") that may not be disclosed outside Acero and may not be duplicated, used or disclosed in whole or in part for any purpose other than to evaluate this Proposal. The data subject to this restriction are contained in sheets (insert page numbers or other identification)."; and,

2. Mark each sheet or data to be restricted with the following legend: "Use or disclosure of data contained on this sheet is subject to the restriction on the title page of this Proposal."

To the extent that Proposals received as a result of the RFP are subject to disclosures required by law, including disclosures under the Freedom of Information Act, the Proposals will be open to the public unless the Company requests in its Proposal that the state treat certain information as confidential. A request for confidential treatment will not supersede the legal obligations imposed by state or federal laws.

Acero will not honor requests to keep the entire Proposal confidential, and the Company must show specific grounds or rules that support confidential treatment. If a Company requests confidential treatment, the Company must submit one (1) additional copy of the Proposal with the confidential information redacted. Companies shall include in the redacted copy a description of the information redacted. By separate attachment to the un-redacted Proposal, Company must list the information to receive confidential treatment and the section and page number of the Proposal on which it appears. Nothing herein shall obligate Acero to withhold information subject to disclosures required by law. A Company must hold harmless and

indemnify Acero for all costs or damages associated with Acero defending Company's request for confidential treatment.

G. Governing Law and Forum

Illinois law and rules govern this solicitation, including to the extent that the terms of this RFP are incorporated into any resulting contract. Companies must bring any action relating to this RFP in the appropriate court in the State of Illinois.

H. Award Notices

Acero will post a notice to the Acero website identifying the selected Company only after contract negotiations are finalized. Prior to the posting, Acero may accept or reject Company's Proposal as submitted, or may require contract negotiations. If negotiations do not result in an acceptable agreement, Acero may reject Company's Proposal and begin negotiations with another Company.

I. Additional Conditions

By submitting a Proposal, it is understood that the entity submitting the selected Proposal shall perform all services and functions required in this RFP. The services contemplated are professional in nature. It is understood that the selected Company must be of professional status, licensed for all applicable professional discipline(s) requiring licensing, and in good standing with its state of incorporation, if applicable. The Company and each of its members, employees, agents, or subcontractors must be financially solvent and competent to perform the services required under this RFP document. Subcontractors will be subject to the same standards, duties, and disclosures as the selected entity.

Further, it is understood that all Proposals that would require the Company to hire or engage subcontractors to carry out the proposed services must clearly identify such subcontractors and the work they will perform. The name, address, and EIN of any known subcontractors must be provided. Acero will not refuse a Proposal based upon the use of subcontractors. However, Acero retains the right to refuse the subcontractors Company has selected if the use of such subcontractors would violate the procurement policies of Acero.

Further, it is understood that all reports, information, or data prepared or assembled by the selected entity under a contract awarded pursuant to this RFP are confidential in nature and will not be made available to any individual or organization without the prior written approval of Acero.

J. Debarment/Suspension

By submitting a response to this RFP, Company certifies that it is not presently debarred, suspended, proposed for debarment, declared ineligible, or voluntarily excluded from bidding or participating in this transaction under 105 ILCS 5/10-20.21(b) or by any Federal or State department of agency.

K. Contract Terms

By submitting a response to this RFP, you acknowledge that if your Proposal is accepted by Acero, Company's Proposal and related submittals may become part of the contract. Acero will negotiate contract terms upon selection. Acero reserves the right to refuse an award of a contract

to any entity submitting a Proposal based on a failure to agree to terms and conditions that are in the best interest of Acero and its affiliates. If a selected entity is refused an award of a contract, Acero reserves the right to select any other entity submitting a Proposal in response to this RFP for such an award.

L. Reservation of Rights

Acero reserves the right to:

1. Reject any or all of the Proposals, including the lowest price Proposal;
2. Withdraw the entire RFP;
3. Issue a subsequent RFP;
4. Remedy errors in the RFP;
5. Seek the assistance of outside technical experts to review Proposals;
6. Approve or disapprove the use of particular subcontractors and suppliers;
7. Award a Contract to one or more Companies;
8. Waive informalities and irregularities in Proposals; or
9. Disqualify the Proposal(s) upon evidence of collusion with intent to defraud or other illegal practices on the part of Company(s).

IX. TABLE OF EXHIBITS

Company Conflict of Interest Certification	*Exhibit A*
Pricing Form	*Exhibit B*
2026-2027 Acero School Locations	*Exhibit C*

X. AUTHORITY AND SIGNATURE

You acknowledge that you read, understand and agree to be bound by the terms of this RFP. You represent, warrant and covenant that your response to each section of this RFP is accurate, complete, and has been submitted by the Proposal Due Date. You understand and agree to be bound by your responses to each section of this RFP, including, but not limited to, any and all supplemental documentation and attachments. You have full power and authority to enter into an Agreement based upon the information contained in this RFP and any Proposal; and the person signing this Proposal on your behalf has been properly authorized and empowered to respond to this RFP and provide the information required to respond to this RFP.

_____

Signature of Person Signing the Proposal

_____

Printed Name

_____

Title

_____

Company Name

_____

Date Signed

EXHIBIT A

ACERO SCHOOLS CHICAGO

VENDOR CONFLICT OF INTEREST CERTIFICATION

Acero Charter Schools, Inc. ("Acero") is committed to avoiding any transactions involving conflicts of interest, or even the appearance of conflicts of interest, between vendors and Acero's officers, directors, employees, and agents. Acero's conflict of interest policies are intended to prevent the personal interest of any Acero employee or Board member from inappropriately affecting the decisions and actions of Acero concerning transactions, expenditures, and other matters.

Therefore, each entity ("Vendor") that enters into a transaction with Acero, and any of the Vendor's subcontractors, must disclose a relative, business, or other relationship with (1) Acero's officers, directors, employees, or (2) family members of Acero's officers, directors, and employees, that would be considered a conflict of interest or may create the appearance of a conflict of interest.

For purposes of this certification, "relative" is defined as: spouse, civil union partner, domestic partner, parent, child, step-child, sibling, step-sibling, half-sibling, grandparent or grandchild, parents-in law and siblings-in law, and any person living in the same domicile with you.

Does the undersigned Vendor, Vendor officers, directors, or employees have a relative, business, or other relationship that could be perceived as potentially influencing a business decision, with any officer, director or employee of Acero? With regard to relationships with Acero employees, the Vendor needs only to disclose those relationships with employees that have authority, or are in a position to influence those with authority, to enter into contracts on behalf of Acero.

[ ] Yes

[ ] No

If yes, please identify: (1) the name and title of the Acero employee, officer, or director with whom the Vendor has a relationship; (2) the name and title of the Vendor's employee, officer, or director with whom Acero has a relationship; and (3) the precise nature of such relationship.

_____

_____

_____

_____

For each of the Vendor's subcontractors, do any of the subcontractor's officers, directors, or employees have any business, familial, romantic, friendship, or other relationship that could be perceived as potentially influencing a business decision, with any officer or employee of Acero? With regard to relationships with Acero employees, the subcontractor

needs only to disclose those relationships with employees that have authority, or are in a position to influence those with authority, to enter into contracts on behalf of Acero.

[ ] Yes

[ ] No

If yes, please identify: (1) the name and title of the Acero employee, officer, or director with whom the subcontractor has a relationship; (2) the name and title of the subcontractor's employee, officer, or director with whom Acero has a relationship; and (3) the precise nature of such relationship.

_____

_____

_____

_____

Any Vendor or subcontractor that fails to disclose any relationship that would constitute a conflict of interest, or create the appearance of a conflict of interest, may be subject to debarment from future contracts with Acero or its affiliated entities. Additionally, it is the Vendor or subcontractor's responsibility to disclose to Acero any future conflicts of interest, or appearances of conflicts of interest, that may arise during the duration of the contract.

The undersigned certifies that they are a person with knowledge of the facts and assertions made on this form and that all statements contained in this disclosure are true, accurate, and complete as of the date affixed to the signature below.

_____ _____

(Print or type name of the Vendor) Date

_____

(Print or type name of the Disclosing Party)

_____

(Signature of Disclosing Party)

EXHIBIT B: Pricing Form

Entity Name: Acero Schools
E-Rate BEN: 16034169
Form 470#: 270002974

PRICING ATTACHMENT RESPONSE INSTRUCTIONS

Unless otherwise specified in the Form 470 or filing attachments, the following apply to this solicitation:
1) The Pricing Attachment worksheet is required to be completed by all Offerors and included with all proposal submissions in Excel format.
2) Offerors are only responsible for completing the information in the yellow columns.
3) Should there be a discrepancy between the fees listed in this Pricing Attachment and any other proposal response document, the costs offered in this document shall prevail.
4) Specific models may have been listed below to provide a better understanding of the specs the applicant is interested in. As per E-rate rules, ALL proposals that include solutions functionally equivalent to the models listed below will be reviewed and considered. If proposals include an equivalent solution, vendors must also provide documentation demonstrating the solution listed on the response is functionally equivalent to what is requested.

Service Providers are requested to add their logo here or, in addition to this Pricing Attachment, submit a separate quote that includes their company logo.

OFFEROR INFORMATION

Service Provider:	
SPIN:	
Contact Name:	
Contact E-mail:	
Contact Phone:	

PRICING SCHEDULE

REQUESTED SOLUTION (OR EQUIVALENT)					PROPOSED SOLUTION SERVICE PROVIDERS MUST ENTER THE MAKE/MODEL DETAILS OF OFFERED ITEMS IN THIS SECTION						PROPOSAL COST CALCULATIONS		
Is Installation required?	Product Type	Make	Model #/SKU	Quantity	Make	Enter Make if "Other" in Column H	Model #/SKU	Quantity	E-Rate Product Eligibility %	Unit Cost	Total Extended E-Rate Eligible Cost	Total Extended E-Rate Ineligible Cost	Total Extended Cost
Yes	Router	Cisco Systems	Catalyst 8500-12X	2							$ -	$ -	$ -
Yes	Router	Cisco Systems	Catalyst 8300-1N1S-4T2X or 8300-2N2S-4T2X	6							$ -	$ -	$ -
Yes	Module	Cisco Systems	C-NIM-2X (2-Port 10G SFP+ Network Interface Module)	6							$ -	$ -	$ -
Yes	Transceiver	Cisco Systems	SFP-10G-T-X (10GBASE-T copper SFP+ module)	32							$ -	$ -	$ -
Yes	Transceiver	Cisco Systems	SFP-10G-SR (10GBASE-SR multimode optical transceiver)	32							$ -	$ -	$ -
Yes	Cabling	Cisco Systems	CAB-OM4-LC-LC-3M (3 m LC-to-LC OM4 duplex fiber patch cable)	32							$ -	$ -	$ -
Yes	License	Cisco Systems	HSECK9 High Security Export License	8							$ -	$ -	$ -
Yes	License	Cisco Systems	Catalyst SD-WAN Advantage subscription- 5 YR	8							$ -	$ -	$ -
Yes	Installation, Activation, & Initial Configuration		Professional implementation for each router	8							$ -	$ -	$ -
No	Training		Minimum 4-hour hands-on administrative training session for Acero IT personnel.	1							$ -	$ -	$ -
No	Fees, Taxes, etc	Other	Shipping Charges	1	Other	Shipping	Shipping Charges	1			$ -	$ -	$ -
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Unless otherwise noted, all quoted materials will be considered Internal Connections (IC). If the offer includes BMIC or MIBS services, please indicate which items the designation applies to.

EXHIBIT C

Acero Schools Locations

Brighton Park
4420 S. Fairfield Ave.
Chicago, IL 60632

Roberto Clemente
2050 N. Natchez Ave.
Chicago, IL 60707

Jovita Idar
5050 S. Homan Ave.
Chicago, IL 60632

Officer Donald J. Marquez
2916 W. 47th St.
Chicago, IL 60632

Victoria Soto
5025 S. St. Louis Ave.
Chicago, IL 60632

Veteran's Memorial Campus (VMC)
4248 W. 47th St.
Chicago, IL 60632

- Major Hector P Garcia MD
  4248 W. 47th St., Third Floor
  Chicago, IL 60632
- PFC. Omar E. Torres
  4248 W. 47th St., Second Floor
  Chicago, IL 60632
- SPC. Daniel Zizumbo
  4248 W. 47th St., First Floor
  Chicago, IL 60632

Data Center
216 W. Jackson Blvd.
Chicago, IL 60606