

SCHOLARMATCH, INC.
REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

Digital Certification Pathways Initiative Consultant

Date Issued:
September 11, 2026

Deadline:
September 25, 2026

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

Founded in 2010 by author Dave Eggers, ScholarMatch is a national nonprofit supporting first-generation, low-income students from junior year of high school through career launch as one of the few organizations in the country with an integrated college access, persistence, and career success model spanning up to seven years of continuous relationship. Our work is relationship-based, equity-minded, and student-centered.

ScholarMatch's college success program, the Scholars Program, provides holistic advising and targeted financial support to ensure students persist, graduate college, and build the skills and experiences necessary to land a fulfilling first job after graduation. We are proud of the outcomes of our work, seeing consistent success for our students including the following:

- 98% freshman persistence rate
- 82%+ of our college students graduate within 6 years and 80%+ of our college students graduate within 5 years, nearly 400% the national average for low-income, first-generation students.
- 100% of our most recent graduating class completed a substantive professional development experience.
- 83% of ScholarMatch alumni survey respondents share that they were either employed or enrolled full-time in graduate school within six months of college graduation.
- Students go on to gain employment at a variety of notable companies and organizations, including Adobe, Meta, Raytheon, the San Francisco Education Fund, The New York Times, and more.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

ScholarMatch's **Digital Certification Pathways Initiative** is a two-year pilot serving up to 50 college students from our Scholars Program, pairing direct funding for industry-recognized credentials (up to \$3,000/student) with individualized advising and career integration support. The pilot is intentionally a direct-service initiative and an organizational learning effort that intends to inform the sector.

The Digital Certification Pathways Initiative responds to a clear strategic priority: ensuring that first-generation college students graduate not only with a bachelor's degree, but with the applied skills, professional confidence, and workforce-recognized credentials needed to launch economically mobile careers. While ScholarMatch's existing college persistence and career launch programming already help students navigate academic, financial, and professional barriers, the rapidly changing labor market requires a more robust strategy. This initiative prioritizes supporting students to earn short-term, high-value certifications in specialized sectors, such as healthcare and information technology, that can provide a high return on investment for their early career launch and economic mobility. ScholarMatch plans to support certifications that are industry-recognized, skills-based, and aligned with the high-growth employment sectors many of our students seek out.

With this RFP, ScholarMatch solicits proposals from consultants who have specialized experience to support the Digital Certification Pathways Initiative as an expert partner.

We are specifically interested in partners who can help us:

- Complete a labor market analysis
- Develop a vetted credential set
- Develop training for current staff advisors and volunteer career coaches
- Design evaluation systems for monitoring student progress and career outcomes
- Connect us into adjacent field initiatives (e.g. regional workforce development programs)
- Contribute back to the field through potential future white papers and presentations

SCOPE OF WORK

Digital Certification Pathways Initiative (DCPI) is a two-year pilot helping first-generation, low-income college students translate industry-recognized credentials into economic mobility. Over the course of twelve months (October 2026-September 2027), the DCPI Consultant will execute the following:

- Complete a labor market analysis evaluating scholars' top declared majors through Labor Market Information sources (e.g. Lightcast, Bureau of Labor Statistics).
- Develop a high-quality recommended credential set using Credential Engine, the Credential Value Index, regional employer signals, and other relevant data sources.
 - Integrate a vetting rubric for first-gen students that weighs wage outcomes, employer recognition, stackability, and equity.
- Develop training and resources for current staff advisors and volunteer college coaches so they can provide individualized advising to students on translating those credentials into internships and early career opportunities
 - Create a Digital Certification Pathways Playbook and advising dashboard that our staff advisors and 300+ volunteer career coaches can use to guide students
- Design evaluation systems for monitoring student progress and tracking certificate and career outcomes, including enrollment, completion, satisfaction, and post-graduation employment outcomes against a matched non-participating cohort.
 - Evaluation systems will be maintained in-house by ScholarMatch
 - Example metrics:
 - Percentage of participating students employed after graduation compared to non participating cohort
 - Percentage of participating graduates report that certifications positively contributed to their job search or employment outcomes
 - Employment outcomes (placement, salary) at time of graduation and six months after graduation
- Connect us into adjacent field initiatives (e.g. regional workforce development programs)

- Contribute back to the field as potential collaborators on future white papers and presentation

Additional expectations:

- Attend regular project meetings via Zoom
- Provide detailed project updates
- Respond to communication in a timely manner

PROJECT TIMELINE

Timeline	Activity	Objectives	Outcomes
October 2026 - March 2027	Planning and Design	Consultant completes labor market analysis and vetting rubric, develops recommended credential set. Consultant provides “train the trainer” training to ScholarMatch staff	Completion and publication of Digital Certification Pathways Playbook (DCPP) and dashboard
April - September 2027	Volunteer & Staff Training	ScholarMatch completes hands-on training for remaining staff and 50 volunteer career coaches in best practices for supporting students in obtaining credentials, utilizing the DCCP. Consultant develops evaluation protocols for tracking career outcomes.	100% of advisors will be trained and equipped to begin individualized certification planning 100% of career mentors will be trained on the Digital Certification Pathways Playbook
October 2027 - September 2028	Enroll 50 Scholars in Digital Certification Pathways	ScholarMatch provides 50 Students with up to \$3,000 for credential fees plus career coaching, and logistical support to complete relevant certifications along with ongoing holistic and academic advising support. ScholarMatch provides students ongoing college and career coaching. ScholarMatch tracks data and outcomes using consultant-developed protocols.	90% of participating students will enroll in certification pathways 75% of participating students will earn one or more industry-recognized, high-value certifications 85% of participating students will report satisfaction with the support provided by ScholarMatch

Please note: the budget for this project is not to exceed \$100,000.

Following the evaluation of responses to this RFP, ScholarMatch may select one or more consultant agencies to provide its desired services.

In issuing this RFP, ScholarMatch makes no commitment to establish a work contract with any consultant(s) responding to this RFP, either within the dates specified in the RFP or at any other date(s). ScholarMatch will not reimburse consultants for any expenses or pay for any implied services associated with responses to this RFP – consultants electing to respond to this RFP must do so entirely at their own expense. ScholarMatch agrees to maintain all consultant proposal materials as private and confidential and not display or disseminate them to any individuals other than those evaluating their contents for purposes of this RFP. All proposals and collateral materials submitted in response to this RFP become the property of ScholarMatch and will not be returned to consultants.

RFP TIMELINE

September 11, 2026	Formal Release of the RFP
September 25, 2026	Proposals due by 5:00 p.m. PDT to rfp@scholarmatch.org
September 30, 2026	ScholarMatch invites selected candidates for interviews
October 7, 2026	Notification of decision
October 15, 2026	Desired start date for consultant
September 30, 2027	Desired completion for scope of work

ScholarMatch reserves the right to adjust any of these dates as necessary to meet its needs. In the event that any of the dates are adjusted, ScholarMatch will send information about the date changes to all consultants to whom this RFP was originally distributed as well as any other consultants that have made their interests known to ScholarMatch.

PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS

Please note that electronic proposals must be submitted in a PDF format. Proposals are expected to be responsive to all the questions and considerations raised throughout the RFP. An agency's failure to provide sufficient information on, or conformity with, any item within this RFP may be sufficient cause for ScholarMatch to reject any further consideration of that agency's proposal.

Proposal must include the following:

- Name and full contact information of a single individual for the purpose of communications related to receiving and evaluating your agency's response to this RFP.
- Agency description, including:
 - A brief history of the consultant's organization
 - Current agency descriptive information
 - Full disclosure of agency ownership details
 - A list of the program research and design consultant's five largest (by work volume) current clients
 - Names, addresses, telephone numbers, and email addresses of at least two former clients who may be contacted for references
 - Names of ALL other current or recent clients engaged in programs similar to those of ScholarMatch
- The specific individual(s) who will act in the capacity of Account Executive, lead, and support staff for the ScholarMatch contract. For the involved individual(s), the proposal must include:
 - A detailed biography or resume
 - A job description for the individual(s) in relation to this contract
- Complete explanation of the policies, processes, tools, resources, procedures, schedules, reports, etc. that will be used to deliver the desired goods and services.
- Explanation of the comprehensive process for proposing and controlling changes to the proposed work processes, products and service requirements, and their associated time and budget constraints.
- Explanation of the management processes your agency regularly uses to ensure that the products and services you provide are timely, correct, consistent, complete, and high in quality. Please explain any policies you have related to warranties of your work, and how those policies are implemented and enforced. Explain the avenues of recourse ScholarMatch will have in the event that it is not satisfied with the products and services rendered as a result of this contract.
- Pricing
 - The proposed pricing of products and services offered by the program research and design consultant agency must reveal and encompass all anticipated expenses.
- Samples of previous work

- As an attachment to the proposal, please submit one or two case-history examples of materials and services prepared for current or recent clients, similar in nature to what you are proposing for ScholarMatch.
- If possible, please prepare or modify these attachments to protect their confidentiality and hide the identity of your client(s). These materials will be kept confidential and will not be returned.
- Your proposal must affirm ALL the following statements. In doing so, please provide any required information. You must explicitly reveal and explain any exceptions to or deviations from these statements.
 - Your agency is properly registered and/or bonded in all states required in order to provide your services and/or sell your products.
 - Neither your agency, or its officers, directors or owners, nor any current client of your agency has any state, federal, internal revenue, postal, or federal trade commission criminal enforcement actions pending against it, nor have any of these organizations or individuals had such an action pending or current in the past 36 months to the best of the knowledge of any officer, director or owner of your agency.
 - Your agency or your principals and owners have the following affiliates, which are partially or wholly owned by your agency or your principals and owners or with which your agency deals, other than completely “at arms length.” (List_____).
 - Of the preceding list of affiliates, the following are proposed as subcontractors under your agency’s proposal to ScholarMatch (List_____).
 - Before entering into any contract with ScholarMatch, your agency understand that it will be required to agree not to enter into any agreements or understandings of any type or description with any current consultants or subcontractors to ScholarMatch which would provide commissions, finders fees, discounts, or any form of compensation or benefit to your agency or to any third party (including officers, directors or staff of ScholarMatch) other than directly to ScholarMatch except as specifically approved in writing by ScholarMatch.
 - Your agency has all of the required commercial general liability insurances, including professional liability, workers’ compensation and personal injury and advertising injury (provide current certificate if awarded contract).

SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

Please email proposals to rfp@scholarmatch.org
By September 25, 2026, at 5:00 p.m. (Pacific Time).

INQUIRIES

All suggestions and inquiries pertaining to this RFP should be addressed to:
Devon Moore
Senior Director of Programs and Compliance
Email Address: rfp@scholarmatch.org