

HARVARD UNIVERSITY – Request for Information

Graduate, Professional Student, and Parent Loan Program



Cambridge, MA, (11/06/2025) – Harvard University is pleased to announce a Request for Information (RFI) seeking responses from private lenders who offer education loans. The primary objective of this RFI is to fill the gap created by changes to the Direct Loan programs under OBBBA, beginning with the 2026-27 academic year. Harvard's objective is to expand access to affordable educational financing options for eligible students.

Harvard hopes to select and publish loan products from different lenders on a Preferred Lender List. We are interested in working with lenders to explore new, creative, and viable options, including potential risk-share arrangements, to offer students the best pricing and borrower benefits.

Harvard University seeks the following from prospective lenders:

- **Comprehensive Funding:** Loans should be provided up to the full cost of attendance as determined by Harvard University.
- **Uniform Interest Rates:** We prefer a low, fixed interest rate for all qualifying students.
- **Eligibility:** We prefer loan products that are available to eligible domestic students. Additionally, we seek to ensure that any student who would have qualified for federal loans qualifies under this program. We also prefer loan products that are accessible to eligible international students, and ideally, do not require a U.S. cosigner.
- **Terms and Conditions:** We prefer terms and conditions that align closely with those offered under the Federal Direct Loan program.
- **Competitive and Supportive Offerings:** Lenders must demonstrate competitive interest rates, superior customer service, and beneficial terms for borrowers, including flexible repayment options and borrower benefits.

Thank you in advance for reviewing this RFI. Interested parties are invited to submit responses to SFS_UFALO@harvard.edu by **November 25, 2025**.

Loan Borrowing at Harvard

In AY 2024/25, Harvard students borrowed ~\$204M in loans, of which ~\$101.4M were federal loans and ~\$89.7M were private loans.

The University-wide Cohort Default Rate (CDR), based on the U.S. Department of Education data, has remained low; this data is included in the table below. Please note that the CDR appears as zero for 2020-2022, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the automatic forbearances provided to federal loan borrowers during that period.

3-Year Cohort Default Rates-FFEL and DL Programs				
Year	# defaults in 3-year CDR	# loans in 3-year CDR	Default Rate	
2022	0	1,539	0.0%	
2021	0	1,821	0.0%	
2020	0	1,775	0.0%	
2019	7	2,065	0.3%	
2018	18	1,973	0.9%	
2017	22	1,965	1.1%	
2016	17	2,015	0.8%	
2015	26	2,146	1.2%	

Terms & Conditions

Harvard seeks the best possible offering for students enrolled at least half-time, subject to the following:

1. **Application.** The student application process must be fully online and available 24/7.
2. **Systems.** Harvard uses ELM One and ELM NDN to manage loans and prefers responding lenders to be able to certify, adjust, and disburse via real-time processing on ELM One.
3. **Confidential Materials and Ownership of Responses.** Confidential materials should not be submitted as a response. Responses marked as confidential will neither be accepted nor honored. All responses become the property of Harvard.
4. **Rejection.** Harvard reserves the right to reject any and all responses.
5. **Cost.** The respondents bear all costs incurred in the preparation and presentation of the RFI to Harvard.
6. **Non-Endorsement.** Respondents and lenders agree to make no reference to Harvard University at any time in any literature, promotional material, brochures, sales presentation, or the like, whether online or not, without prior written approval from Harvard University. No public disclosure or press release pertaining to the specifications or RFI process shall be made public without prior written approval from Harvard University.
7. **Conflicts of Interest.** If the respondent or any individual working on the RFI has a possible conflict of interest, the respondent shall include in its response a statement indicating the nature of the conflict. Harvard University reserves the right to reject the response if, in its sole discretion, any interest disclosed from any source could give the appearance of a

conflict or cause speculation as to the objectivity of the loan program. Harvard's determination regarding any question of conflict of interest shall be final.

8. **Global Reach.** Harvard is a global community. We seek to keep the cost of borrowing as low as possible for our domestic and international student populations.

Key Data Elements in the Response

Requirement: **All respondents must complete and return the RFI Response Matrix, attached.**

The following are key data elements that are included in the matrix.

1. **Interest Rate:** We prefer a fixed interest rate for loans first disbursed during any 12-month period beginning on July 1 and ending on June 30. The interest rate will be equal to the 10-year Treasury note, plus a margin of Xbps as specified in the RFI Response Matrix.
2. **Credit Scoring:** We prefer to offer this program to all students regardless of credit history. We do not object to credit information being collected, but object to it being used for lending decisions. We prefer that credit scoring not be used to determine the interest rate.
3. **Risk Share:** We will consider risk-sharing structures to help achieve lower interest rates for our students. Please provide details on any risk-sharing proposals. Our goal is to achieve the lowest possible rates for our students while avoiding or minimizing costs to Harvard. Feel free to provide multiple answers and/or matrices for each option as needed.
4. **Fees:** We prefer a no-fee product. Please describe your proposed fees for the following categories: application fees, origination fees, forbearance fees, guarantee fees, late fees, including default interest rates, and any other fees. Indicate when you will assess any fees. If you charge late fees, how many occurrences can accrue in one calendar year? Is the amount of late fees capped?
5. **Cosigner:** We prefer a product without a cosigner requirement for either domestic or international borrowers.
6. **Aggregate Borrowing Limits:** We prefer a product with no aggregate borrowing limit. If you need to impose one, please specify how flexible you will be once a student reaches this number.
7. **Interest Capitalization.** We prefer that the first capitalization be postponed until active repayment begins. Please outline your interest capitalization policy.
8. **Repayment:**
 - a. We prefer a 10 or 15-year term for repayment, with in-school deferment.
 - b. Borrowers should be able to prepay or accelerate payments without penalty.
 - c. We require borrowers to have the ability to prepay principal during the in-school, grace, deferment, and forbearance periods, even if they have accrued uncapitalized interest on their accounts.
9. **First Payment Due:** Do you provide a grace period after the student is no longer in attendance before repayment begins? Define when the first payment is due.
10. **Repayment Incentives and Options:** Please detail your repayment incentives, both front-end and back-end, e.g., options for on-time and auto-debit payments. Can a borrower lose the incentive? Do you have a "cure" process whereby the incentive can be restored?

11. **Deferments:** We prefer that these terms mirror as closely as possible the terms for William D. Ford Federal Direct Loans (“Direct Loans”). Please detail your policies for deferment. Include a provision for deferments in the event of unemployment, illness, or a catastrophic event. Please know that we have joint-degree students in programs such as medicine and dentistry, which have extended training beyond their academic requirements, and require appropriate deferment privileges.
12. **Forbearance:** We prefer that these terms mirror as closely as possible the terms for Federal Direct Loans. Please detail your policies and procedures for forbearance arrangements. Indicate if there is a standard offering plus additional time available at the lender’s discretion.
13. **Military Status:** We prefer that these terms mirror as closely as possible the terms for Federal Direct Loans. Please define how an active-duty military status will affect the grace period and interest accrual on the loan.
14. **Death & Disability Cancellation:** We prefer that these terms mirror as closely as possible the terms for Federal Direct Loans. Please describe the availability of death and disability cancellation, either via pooled risk or the offering of low-cost insurance to the borrowers.
15. **Servicing Standards:** We require that our students and families receive industry-leading customer service. Please complete the *Servicing Standards* section of the response matrix accompanying this RFI.

About Harvard University

Harvard University, established in 1636, is the oldest institution of higher learning in the United States and is renowned for its academic excellence and the distinguished achievements of its alumni. Harvard University strives to enroll the most highly qualified students worldwide. For more information on Harvard University (e.g., total enrollment, international enrollment, resources), please review the Harvard University Fact Book.

Timing

November 6, 2025: Press Release

November 13, 2025 by 12 pm noon: Questions submitted to the University Financial Aid Liaison Office (UFALO), SFS_UFALO@harvard.edu

November 20, 2025 by 5 pm: Answers distributed to all respondents

November 25, 2025: Response submission deadline

Prior to March 1, 2026: School informs respondents of preferred lender list standing

RFI Contact:

Please submit all responses and/or inquiries by email to **The University Financial Aid Liaison Office** at SFS_UFALO@harvard.edu