

Title:		Contents:	P-3200
REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS		Submitted By:	Purchasing Division
		Approved By:	Purchasing Agent
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Request for Proposal (RFP)

The Request for Proposal (RFP) process is primarily used when the County's requirements are defined, but the means or methods to meet the objectives cannot be clearly established. Typically, this occurs in cases where outside expertise in the area of services or technical solutions are necessary, and when factors other than price are considered in the award. The RFP process requires a contractor to prepare a written proposal that explains in detail how he/she plans to meet the County's requirement. Innovative ideas and techniques that the contractor feels may benefit the County may be included in the proposal.

Concurrently, the RFP process may also be applicable to the acquisition of commodities when the need for an evaluated technical performance, service or value added service component, or any related technical solution component exists.

An award made under RFP process is based on a variety of evaluated factors which may include: contractor references, business approach, technical superiority, overall cost effectiveness, etc. The evaluation criteria, designed to be objective and measurable, is set-forth in each RFP.

Essential Elements/Characteristics of a RFP

RFP's are usually reserved for large dollar value requirements. The process is complex and time consuming and is not feasible for smaller requirements.

RFP's contain all the usual boilerplate language and the following:

- Requirements statement (or statement of work)
 - Responsibility criteria
 - Information regarding submission of RFP responses
 - Evaluation criteria - criteria on which the proposal will be evaluated including the weighting for each listed criteria. To avoid criticism for manipulating, favoritism, etc., the evaluation criteria should be stated up front within the RFP. For example, the evaluation criteria could be 50% for cost, 25% for the solution to the County requirements, 15% for experience, and 10% for oral presentation.
- Note: The Purchasing Agent uses an evaluation scoring system where the total points equal 10,000.
- Standard terms and conditions

General Guidelines

A two-step process may be used to streamline the evaluation process and to minimize the high costs to potential suppliers to prepare a full-scale proposal. The first step in the process is to pre-qualify vendors based on specific criteria. The second step is to solicit proposals only from the qualified vendors.

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A bidder's conference is normally held to allow the bidders to ask questions and clarify any ambiguities. The questions and answers are prepared as an amendment to the RFP and sent to all bidders.

Each RFP shall state the County's right to reject any or all bids and waive any irregularities or informalities therein.

Effective Proposal Evaluation Documents

Characteristics of effective evaluation documents include the following elements:

- Uniform criteria and process established and set forth in solicitation document.
- Actual proposal evaluation considers Proposer's responsiveness to the Statement of Work, resources and capability to provide the required commodities, services, performance history, and cost.
- Evaluation criteria stated in solicitation document tracks to information the Proposers are instructed to provide in their proposals.
- Evaluation committee comprised of appropriate balance of subject matter experts and non-technical staff.
- Results in fair and comprehensive assessment of Proposer responses.

Developing the Evaluation Document:

When developing an Evaluation Document, keep in mind that proposals can only be evaluated on what was requested in the RFP and what was submitted in the proposal. There must be consistency and complete disclosure between both the RFP and the Evaluation Document. To ensure the consistency between the two documents, the Evaluation Document is to be developed simultaneously with the RFP. If this is not possible, the Evaluation Document must be completed prior to receiving any proposals. This will eliminate the actual or perceived impression that an evaluation document was tailored for a specific proposal.

Elements of the Evaluation Documents include the following:

- Establish Minimum Requirements (Pass/Fail) as identified in the Solicitation Document
- Proposer's Qualifications:
 - Length, Scope and Depth of Past Experience (Contractor & Staff)
 - Types of Skills Staff Must Possess
 - Financial Capability (Financial Statement Analysis, Dun & Bradstreet Reports, Credit Reports, 10K Report Review, etc.)
 - Licensing Requirements

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- Technical/Management Approach to Providing Required Services - how will the Proposer provide the required commodities or services?
 - Project Methodology/Innovation
 - Compliance with specifications and/or performance outcomes
 - Suitability and appropriateness of how services will be provided or work will be performed
 - Quality control plans and methods
 - Error rates, testing capability, process controls
 - Use of technology
 - Equipment capabilities
 - Management reports
 - Implementation plans and timing
 - Ability to meet deadlines
 - Learning curves
 - Compliance with regulations
 - Alternatives (exceptions or recommended improvements)
 - Value added

- Project Schedule/Work Plan
 - Personnel Considerations:
 - Desirable Staff Qualifications & Experience
 - Certification(s) Staff Must Possess & Maintain
 - Types of Training/Certifications Staff Must Possess
 - Personnel turnover
 - Availability and location of management and project staff
 - Proposer's Office Location/Contingency Planning

- Cost/Pricing

- Exceptions to Terms and Conditions

- Optional Oral Interview/Optional Site Visit (How will you evaluate?)

- Evaluation point structure and weighting
 - Recommend scale of 10,000 points
 - Cost should not be weighted according to acquisition (e.g., commodity v. service)
 - Category and element weighting should reflect importance of those factors related to a Proposer's ability to meet the County's requirements
 - Some categories such as references and financial capability analysis typically require an independent source to gather the information and report back to the committee so they can arrive at a score
 - Informed Average scoring (through discussion and debate, and then by averaging the numerical ratings)

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Evaluation Committee Member Selection

An Evaluation Committee should consist of 3-5 individuals with attention given to the subject matter expertise for the service being solicited. Members of the Evaluation Committee must not:

- Have been involved the development of the RFP;
- Have a pre-conceived opinion(s) about any of the Proposers, either favorable or unfavorable; and
- Have conflict of interest, either actual or perceived.

Subject Matter Experts, not involved in the development of the RFP may also be used to assist with the review of technical issues of the RFP.

It is important to verify whether that Evaluators involved in the evaluation process do not have actual or perceived conflict of interest or bias. In order to determine whether there may be a conflict of interest or bias, the Analyst should inform the Evaluators of the companies that submitted proposals.

Evaluation Process

Typically a multipart process that includes components such as:

- Pass/Fail - usually handled by the Purchasing Analyst prior to forwarding proposals to Evaluation Committee. Proposals that do not pass would not be sent to the Evaluators.
 - Adherence to submission deadline
 - Proposer has not been debarred by the County
 - Met minimum requirements as set forth in the Solicitation Document
- “No bid” items or those items that do not meet specification – Penalty or Disqualification
 - Identify methodology up-front whether or not “no bid” items or those items that are bid but do not meet the technical specifications will be acceptable to the user department.
 - Include language (as applicable) in the RFP document to notify vendors that “no bid” items or items that are bid but do not meet the technical specifications will be cause for rejection of their bid; or “no bid” items or items that are bid but do not meet technical specifications will be cause for assessment of penalty/deduction of points in cost and/or performance factors in the evaluation.
- Committee Evaluation Process
 - Initial Orientation Meeting
 - Purchasing Analyst is a non-voting Committee Chairperson to facilitate and ensure the integrity of the evaluation process
 - Provide overview and general principles of the process, solicitation document, evaluation documents, target dates, time commitments, etc.
 - Review confidentiality requirements during and after evaluation process

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- Committee evaluation by members separately
- One or more full committee meetings of all members to discuss merits of proposals.
- Committee members may adjust their scoring after the meeting with sufficient narrative to explain the adjustment.
- If conducting site visits and/or oral interviews as part of the process, all committee members must be present at all events.
- Documentation to support evaluation
 - All notes, scoring documents, etc. from each committee member are to be collected by the Purchasing Analyst. The Analyst will total and average the final score of the committee, and prepare a single score sheet with signatures of all committee members.
 - All written notes, score sheets and other evaluation documents will be kept, and placed in the purchasing file by the Analyst.
 - Written documentation of reference checks and financial statement analysis to support rating in those categories
- May use outside sources to gather information
 - Reference checks should not be done by evaluation committee members
 - Financial information can be reviewed by Auditor-Controller or other knowledgeable party
 - Technical staff can review proposal components if necessary and report findings to the committee for their evaluation and rating