

Office of State Procurement Guidelines for: The Request for Proposal Process

General:

The following guidelines developed by the Office of State Procurement are for use in assembling and familiarizing a Request for Proposal (RFP) evaluation committee, but apply equally as well to Request for Qualifications (RFQ) and other procurement actions where an evaluation committee is appropriate to determine the ranking of vendors. The purpose of these guidelines is to help ensure that the committee chairperson and all committee members are thoroughly informed of their responsibilities and understand their obligations. The guidelines emphasize the need to maintain written documentation of the committee's actions and decisions. Finally, following the fundamental steps outlined in this guideline will serve to limit delays that can result from administrative and/or legal actions initiated by respondents. The OSP Buyer and/or the institution or agency procurement staff serves as the primary point of contact to ensure proper procedures are followed in the RFP evaluation process.

Committee Selection:

The selection of evaluation committee members is frequently dictated by decisions that have already been made. The initial step in developing a request for proposal begins with the identification of those individuals who will contribute to writing the scope of work and detailing the technical requirements contained in the proposal. Frequently, these same individuals also serve as members of the evaluation committee. Generally, the agency or division director should make the decision of which staff members will make up the selection committee. Evaluation committee members need not be employees of the agency, but must be State employees. If the agency does not have employees with the knowledge and/or expertise with regard to the commodity or service being evaluated and the conditions under which they will be used, the agency will contact other State Agencies, Colleges and Universities or Board and Commissions for assistance. In special circumstances, agencies may consider the use of evaluators who are employees of other Governmental entities or private sector companies; however, the Office of State Procurement must authorize the use of such evaluators. All State Agencies, Colleges and Universities and Board and Commissions shall make a good faith attempt to ensure inclusion of minorities as voting members of the evaluation committee.

Committees must consist of an uneven number of members so that differences of opinion, when they occur, do not result in a tie vote. The primary objective in the selection of committee members is to ensure that each member is completely impartial with regard to the selection of a provider and has sufficient knowledge of the subject matter to competently evaluate proposals. After the members of

the committee have been selected, a chairperson is appointed. The chairperson has the responsibility of coordinating the committee's activities with the Office of State Procurement, the Agency Procurement Official or Procurement Agent at the State agency.

Review of Proposals:

Prior to the evaluation committee assuming its duties, each proposal received and recorded as part of the public bid opening process, is reviewed by the OSP buyer and/or the agency procurement staff to ensure that each contains the essential requirements necessary for the bid to be given further consideration.

These elements should include but are not limited to:

- a. A signature on the bid proposal form which acknowledges the obligations of any contract awarded in connection with the proposal and affirming that the signature represents the commitment of the provider to honor the requirements of any such contract.
- b. A signed original of the proposal.
- c. Financial statements.
- d. The required number of copies of the proposal.
- e. Pricing information. (Usually submitted under separate cover)
- f. Required references.
- g. General compliance with the Statement of Work (SOW)

Those RFPs that are not processed by OSP and/or Agency Procurement staff should also include, at a minimum, the elements above prior to being given further consideration.

Committee Familiarization:

After the proposals have been reviewed, the committee chairperson in coordination with the OSP Buyer schedules a meeting so that each member of the evaluation committee can be given a copy of each proposal and receives instructions about how the evaluation process will proceed. This initial meeting includes a representative from the OSP and agency procurement staff. Their purpose in attending is to go over the proper procedures in the evaluation process, answer questions and make sure that committee members understand their roles and responsibilities. The chairperson must stress the importance of keeping the work of the committee, including all information about respondents, their proposals and the evaluation process, confidential. To aid in reviewing proposals, the chairperson develops an evaluation form that can be distributed and used as a guide by committee members. Generally the form includes a list of the criteria included in the original solicitation along with the corresponding maximum number of points that can be awarded. The evaluation form may also include a set of questions or statements related to the technical aspects

of the proposal. In the process of finding answers to these questions, each committee member will need to carefully read each proposal and note whether the respondent has completely and satisfactorily addressed the requirements. Committee member orientation also includes information about the awarding of points and the need to document, in writing any point deductions. Members should be instructed to carefully review each proposal and make notes of any deficiencies. Written explanation of any point deductions is critical to the success of the committee's function. Committee members should also be instructed to rate each proposal based upon the thoroughness of the response and the understanding the respondent has to the needs expressed in the RFP. Before the meeting is adjourned, the committee chairperson should announce the time, date and place of the next meeting, and remind members to come prepared to discuss each proposal in detail. Written documentation of the committee's actions is critical to the success of the process.

Committee Evaluation:

In subsequent meetings, the Committee Chair must ensure that members of the committee have each read and completed an individual assessment of each of the proposals. Proposals are selected at random and reviewed collectively by the entire committee. This allows each committee member the opportunity to comment, and to have the benefit of hearing what other members of the committee perceive as being the strong and weak points of each proposal. Committee members may add additional notations to their individual assessment of the proposals during the full committee review of all proposals; however, all notes and determinations made by each member are considered a permanent record of the bid file and must be retained. Occasionally, there will be aspects of a particular proposal that require clarification. In such cases, a phone call placed by a member of the evaluation committee on behalf of the committee may suffice. However, under no circumstances should any individual respondent be given the opportunity to submit additional information without allowing all participants in the procurement to participate. On other occasions it may be necessary to invite a respondent to a committee meeting to answer questions. It is important to ensure that any provider, invited to appear before the committee, understands and agrees in writing beforehand that the purpose of the meeting is strictly to allow members of the committee to ask for and receive specific information that will assist in the evaluation process. Detailed notes, including all questions and answers, of any such meeting should be made and retained as a part of the bid file. The OSP buyer or the agency procurement staff should be available to answer questions and provide guidance on the process. They are not, as a general rule, members of the evaluation committee. They are there to ensure the integrity of the process.

Committee Recommendation:

Once all proposals have been reviewed for technical merit, the job of the each committee member is to submit an independent ranking of each proposal

submitted and rank each proposal in order of finish. The scores of each committee member are then tallied by the committee chair and averaged to determine the successful respondent and ranking of all other respondents. Many requests for proposals are issued with instructions requiring respondents to submit pricing information in separate sealed envelopes. The purpose of this practice is to maintain the integrity of the evaluation process by allowing the evaluation committee to focus entirely on the technical merits of the proposals. Only after all proposals have been reviewed and evaluated, are pricing schedules exposed. Points for pricing are calculated, based upon a predefined formula, and added to the technical score. Total points determine the order of finish.

Disposition of Records:

All materials including copies and originals of each proposal, committee member notes, determinations, point-awarding schedule and correspondence whether written or electronic is to be kept as permanent documentation in the respective bid file and is subject to those disclosures permitted under the Freedom of Information (FOI). Unmarked copies of each proposal are not required to be kept as part of the bid file. The Office of State Procurement maintains, as a permanent part of the bid file, all evaluation records for those bids for which we have responsibility. Agency and Institution procurement staff must provide to the OSP Buyer those records necessary to complete the file.

Assistance with the Process:

The OSP staff is always available to provide guidance and assistance on the entire RFP process which includes guiding agency staff through the evaluation process. Please call prior to initiating the Procurement process (RFP, RFQ etc). The OSP staff will meet with the agency staff and/or the procurement staff to answer questions and provide guidance on the conduct of the process. It is always a good policy to request assistance prior to initiating a procurement action rather than after mistakes may have been made.

Responsibility of OSP Buyer:

The OSP buyer is the primary point of contact for a procurement process initiated by OSP on behalf of all State agencies and/or institutions of higher education. That means the OSP buyer is responsible for the timely execution of the process; conducting the initial meeting of the evaluation committee, review of the evaluations, ensuring that the requesting agency full-fills their requirements in a timely manner; control of the evaluation process and ensuring that both the Procurement Law and Rules and sound procurement practices are followed. The buyer has full authority to require any actions necessary by the agency staff to ensure the integrity and proper execution of the procurement process.