

How to Successfully Respond to an RFP

Improve your chances of winning a government contract



At the End of this Workshop...

- Businesses will be able to identify contract opportunities realistic for them
- Understand how the government describes what it needs
- Prepare responsive and effective proposals
- Improve your chances at winning government contracts

What is an RFP?

- ❑ Request for Proposals are used to communicate government requirements to prospective contractors and to solicit proposals

- ❑ RFPs will, at a minimum, describe the:
 - ❑ Government's requirement
 - ❑ Anticipated terms and conditions that will apply to the contract
 - ❑ Information required to be in the offeror's proposal
 - ❑ Factors that will be used to evaluate the proposal and their relative importance

Key Difference Between Bids and Proposals

- ❑ Bids are submitted in response to **Invitation for Bids**
 - ❑ Awards are made based on price
 - ❑ Government's requirement is clearly defined

- ❑ Proposals are submitted in response to RFPs
 - ❑ Awards are made based on price and non-price factors
 - ❑ Quality is most frequently considered
 - ❑ Government's requirement is less defined

Responsiveness and Responsibility

- Universally practiced in government
- A public contract is not awarded unless these two requirements are satisfied
- Responsiveness** refers to your offer
 - Following the instructions
- Responsibility** refers to you
 - Your qualifications
 - A judgement made about your abilities

General Acquisition Process – How RFPs are Created

First Phase

- Mission Review
- Needs Determination
- Requirements Determination
- Define/Describe Requirements (Scope)

Second Phase

- Acquisition Planning
- Solicitation Phase
- Evaluation
- Negotiation
- Contract Award
- Contract Administration
- Contract Close Out

Get in front of the buying cycle

Try to get in at the first phase

- Conduct market research to identify who's buying what you're selling
 - www.openbookny.com
- Try to identify the actual end user
- Attend procurement events/schedule meetings
 - Look for opportunities to meet and develop a relationship with the end user
 - Attempt to identify customer's needs before an RFP is formally advertised
- Attend bid conferences
- Find out if there is an incumbent and who it is
- Listen and interpret
- Position yourself as a solutions provider

Be Prepared

- ❑ Create a business plan – without a strategy, a small business has no road map to follow when identifying and pursuing opportunities
- ❑ Identify your core business capabilities
- ❑ Identify your Government business codes NAICS, PSCs, NIGPs
- ❑ Identify your geographic service area(s)
- ❑ Get certified if you are eligible
- ❑ Create a process for reviewing RFPs and submitting them
- ❑ Gather anticipated documents together:
 - Project experience
 - Resumes
 - References
 - Quality assurance plan
 - Organizational charts



New York State Government

www.nyscr.ny.gov

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| <p>Opportunities posted today 35</p> <p>Opportunities posted in the last 7 days 198</p> <p>Total available opportunities 771</p> |  <p>The New York State Contract Reporter</p> <p><i>NYS' official source of contracting opportunities Bringing business and government together</i></p> | <p>Log In ></p> <p>Sign up and register for your free account!</p> <p>Click here to get started ></p> |
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| I want to find contracts to bid on > | I want to advertise opportunities > | Learn about the New York State Business Registry > | Learn about doing business with New York > |
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New York State Contract Reporter

New York State adheres to procurement guidelines (<http://ogs.ny.gov/bu/pc/Docs/Guidelines.pdf>) and Article 11 of the New York State Finance Law

- ❑ Official website of New York State procurement activity

- ❑ Who advertises on NYSCR?
 - State agencies
 - Authorities
 - State/City universities
 - Public benefit corporations
 - Some municipalities, museums, libraries, and schools, prime contractors

New York State Contract Reporter

- All purchases valued at \$50,000 and above are on New York State Contract Reporter

- Anything below \$50,000 is advertised directly through the agency

What types of ads are on the NYSCR?

❑ Discretionary Spending

- \$50,000 - \$200,000 for all agencies
- \$50,000 - \$125,000 for CUNYs/SUNYs
- Contracts limited to small businesses, SDVOBs, MWBEs
- Excludes construction
- Does not require formal competitive procurement process

❑ Competitive bids

- \$200,000 and above
- Contracts open to all businesses
- There are goals attached to these contracts – usually 15% for MBEs and 15% for WBEs, and 6% for SDVOBs

Components of a New York State RFP

- ❑ Table of contents
- ❑ Description of program objectives and background
- ❑ Scope of services
- ❑ Detailed requirements/specifications
 - Technical proposal submission requirements
 - Cost proposal submission requirements
 - Single award/multiple award
- ❑ Performance standards
- ❑ Overview of the solicitation process

Components of a New York State RFP

Timeline and calendar of events

Request for Proposal # 15DSL0124 - Custodial Management Services



University at Buffalo Request for Proposal 15DSL0124 Custodial Management Services

1. Timeline of Events

| <u>Event</u> | <u>Date</u> |
|---|-------------|
| Issuance of Notice (NYS Contract Reporter ad published) | 4/11/16 |
| Mandatory Pre-Bid Conference/Walkthrough | 5/4/16 |
| Deadline for Submission of Questions | 5/11/16 |
| Answers Issued to All Bidders | 5/18/16 |
| Bid Opening Date | 5/31/16 |
| Bidder Presentations (week of) | 6/13/16 |
| Notice of Award (approximate) | 6/27/16 |
| Contract Sent to Vendor for Signature (approximate) | 7/11/16 |
| Signed Contract sent to AG/OSC for Approval (approximate) | 7/25/16 |
| Commencement of Contract (anticipated) | 11/9/16 |



Components of a New York State RFP

Method of award and evaluation criteria

6. Method of Award

- a. Bids must be submitted on time, and in full. CMFs that meet the requirements of the bid will be scheduled for an onsite presentation.
 - i. The CMF will be given up to two (2) hours for the presentation. For the CMF's convenience, there will be access to a computer, along with a screen and projector.
 - ii. Presenters for the CMF may include the following:
 - 1. Proposed Director
 - 2. Proposed Assistant Directors (2)
 - 3. Proposed Training Manager
 - 4. Up to two (2) additional CMF representatives
 - iii. The presentations will be evaluated according to the Award Criteria.
- b. Award Criteria:

| | |
|------------|-----|
| Technical | 32% |
| General | 29% |
| Price/Cost | 30% |
| MWBE/SDVOB | 9% |

Based on the evaluation criteria of Sections I, II, III, and IV, in conjunction with Attachment A: Management Services, Salaries, and Benefits Fee, and the presentation, with a range of 0-100 points. Each evaluator will score the RFP/presentation and total the criteria. The bidder with the highest Grand Total points, that is deemed to be responsive and responsible, will be awarded a contract. The University reserves the right to make awards within one hundred twenty (120) days after the bid opening, during which period bids shall not be withdrawn unless the bidder specifically states in the bid that the acceptance thereof must be made within a shorter specified time.

Components of a New York State RFP

Offeror's minimum qualifications

7. Qualification of Bidder/Contractor/Submittals

The Bid will be awarded only to a responsible Bidder, qualified by experience and in a financial position to provide the items and services specified. In order to facilitate prompt award of the Bid, the Bidder shall attest to the following:

- a. The Bidder shall be experienced in the supervision of a service of this scope with at least **five (5) years' experience** in this type of work. The actual work shall be done by qualified and experienced employees working under his supervision or under the supervision of an experienced Director who has also been doing this type of work for at least **five (5) years**. Please provide documentation of experience, per Section IV of the bid.

8. Financial Qualifications

- a. The bidder must be in a financial position to perform the duties and responsibilities of the Contract.
- b. **It is mandatory** that all bidders submit financial data, which would adequately reflect their financial stability, hence support the execution of a contract/purchase order. Such information includes:
 - i. A credit report
 - ii. The most recent two audited annual reports
 - iii. Annual financial statements
- c. This information will be held in confidence. The University reserves the right to reject any bidder who does not demonstrate stability sufficient for the scope of this bid.

Components of a New York State RFP

- ❑ Mandatory requirements
- ❑ Reserved rights
- ❑ Method for issuing clarifications or modifications to the RFP
- ❑ Contract terms and conditions
- ❑ Procurement policies, statutes, and disclosures
 - Appendix A (standard clauses)
 - Vendor Responsibility
 - Procurement lobbying law
 - MWBE law
 - Debriefing language
 - Protest procedures
 - Sales and compensating use tax

Other Possible Content in an NYS RFP

- Prequalification criteria
- Risk management/required assurances
- Cost adjustments
- References
- Insurance
- Prevailing Wage
- Consultant Disclosure Legislation

How do I respond to an RFP?

How do I respond to an RFP?

Read Read Read!

- ❑ **Read the RFP once to understand if you are eligible for the work**
 - Does it ask for your core capabilities?
 - Does it seem like its meant for another firm?
 - Is there enough time to apply?
 - Is it set-aside or goaled for a certified business?
 - Is it within your geographical reach?
 - Are you able to perform the work/do you have past experience in performing the work?
 - Am I able to be a responsible and responsive vendor on this project?

- ❑ **Read the RFP a second time to understand the technical aspect of the work**
 - Determine what % of the work can be done in house and where the gaps are
 - Begin to determine how you would price the work
 - Do you think you can be competitive?

- ❑ **Read the RFP a third time to understand how to apply**

How do I respond to an RFP?

❑ Ask as many questions as possible – assume nothing

- There is usually a Q&A period where you can submit questions
- **After** you read through the RFP, ask any questions that you are unsure of – do not ask basic questions that are answered in the RFP
- Some questions to consider:
 - Is there an incumbent?
 - Was there are previous contract number?
 - Technical ambiguities clarified?
 - Documents that are missing?
 - What is the **real need**? How can I **bring value** to the agency?

❑ Carefully consider your key personnel

- Read the education and experience requirements, and exceed them
- Tailor their resumes to be as closely linked to the deliverables as possible

How do I respond to an RFP?

Don't let an RFP bankrupt your business!

- ❑ Common pitfall: your budget is unreasonable – that means you are either too low or too high!
- ❑ The government is risk-averse – if they see a bid whose price is considered unreasonably low, they can justify rejecting it
- ❑ The government does not want to award a contract to the lowest bidder, only too see them fail halfway through the project
- ❑ The government also wants to save the tax-payers money, and so if your bid is unreasonably high, they can justify rejecting it.
- ❑ Do your research
 - Ensure that your pricing includes all of your cost – overhead, insurance
 - Understand if you are competitive
 - Look at past contracts (submit a FOIA or FOIL if you need to) to see how they were priced
 - Collect intelligence

How do I respond to an RFP?

Write a customer-focused proposal

- ❑ Ensure your proposal demonstrates a complete understanding of the customer's needs
 - Gather as much intelligence as possible
 - See the bigger picture
 - Concise and simple!

- ❑ How are you going to solve their problem? How are you going to add value?

“Price is what you pay. Value is what you get.”

~Warren Buffett

How do I respond to an RFP?

Be specific and detailed – even when you think you don't need to be.

Example: Explain your process for submitting invoices and ensuring accuracy.

90% of responses: ABC Company will review all invoices for accuracy and completeness and submit them according to the guidelines.

10% of responses: ABC Company's Accounting Clerk will review invoices for accuracy and completeness. All invoices will be checked to ensure the following items are present and accurate on each invoice: Contract number, remittance address, unit/quantity, price, date, point of contact, cage code, any additional items requested

How do I respond to an RFP?

Explain how and by whom the project will be managed

The government is risk averse - Your job is to ensure them you are capable and competent

- ❑ Identify the project manager

- ❑ Explain who will be staffed on the project, and the chain of command

- ❑ Explain in detail even simple things – a common question – how will staff issues be resolved?
 - What does it say per your standard operating procedures?
 - Who is responsible for hearing such issues?
 - Who will be involved in handling the issue?

How do I respond to an RFP?

Don't use broad, unsubstantiated claims – no fluff!

The government can dismiss claims – they can't dismiss evidence

90% of companies: Our company has 37 years of experience carrying out a variety of rigorous testing programs for the U.S. Navy and has always satisfied its customers' requirements.

10% of companies: Our company has 37 years of experience carrying out surface warfare systems testing at the platform, system, and equipment level. This includes radar systems integration, system design and test agent services for USS TEST class, as well as directing the live-fire portions of Project XYZ, and modernization test program development and execution for Project LMN.

How do I respond to an RFP?

Follow the rules!

- ❑ Follow all formatting requirements

- ❑ If there are little to no formatting requirements, try to mirror the RFP
 - Structure the proposal so it is easy for the evaluator the read and score
 - Always have a table of contents, and use tabs if necessary

- ❑ Make it easy for the evaluators to find information – ensure all attachments are in the correct order

- ❑ Disqualifying actions:
 - Late submission
 - Improper formatting
 - Incomplete responses
 - Poor proposal organization
 - Poorly written
 - Irrelevant past performance
 - Parroting back requirements without discussing methods

How do I respond to an RFP?

Understand the Evaluation Criteria

- ❑ The evaluation criteria is your guide!
 - Understand that these are the ground on which you will be selected, or not
 - Don't waste time going after opportunities that are beyond your capabilities – Go/No Go

- ❑ Does the evaluation criteria heavily weigh:
 - Technical expertise
 - Past performance
 - Pricing
 - Organizational capability
 - Financial capability
 - Quality Assurance

- ❑ Hang the evaluation criteria on the wall, so you can refer to the criteria often and figure out how you can incorporate them into your proposal

How do I respond to an RFP?

Proposal Evaluators – How they Operate

- ❑ Reviewers skim, looking for relevant information and evidence of strength
- ❑ Since there is usually only 1 awardee, reviewers look to reject proposals
- ❑ Reviewers want to know that you have worked on projects of similar size and scope
- ❑ They want unique but not risky solutions
- ❑ Reviewers assume that someone who prepares a poor proposal will do a poor job
- ❑ They appreciate proposals that provide:
 - ❑ What the RFP requests, nothing more or less
 - ❑ Evidence that your key personnel will get the job done
- ❑ After reading your proposal, they must have confidence that you will get the job done

How do I respond to an RFP?

Final Thoughts on Proposal Writing

- Make your point first, and then explain it
- Create a proposal outline from the RFP's instructions and organization
- Support your facts with statistics and reasons
- Use graphics, but only to make a point
- Avoid overblown statements – “collectively, the experience of the company's staff exceed x years”
- Use simple language
- Assume that your proposal is the 20th being read at 11 pm

Make sure your proposal is easy to read, organized, and professional!

I Submitted my Proposal – Now What?

- Find out the selection schedule
 - Check the RFP
 - If not in the RFP, this is a good question to ask during the Q&A

- Check-in periodically

- Respond to any requests promptly

- Prepare for your oral interview or presentation
 - Only one person in charge
 - Rehearse many times
 - Anticipate questions and address them

- Pay close attention to questions asked

- Designate a recorder or note taker

Win or Lose – Always ask for a Debrief

Follow the rules!

A debriefing is an opportunity for the vendor to meet in-person, talk over the phone, or correspond by email about the outcome of a competitive bid process



RFP # 0416-1

Security Guard Services

E. Debriefing of Unsuccessful Proposers

Upon written request via email to William Funk, a debriefing will be scheduled with an unsuccessful Proposer after the Library has provided notice of its selection of one or more successful Proposer(s). Discussion will be limited to a critique of the proposal submitted by the Proposer requesting the debriefing. Comparisons between proposals or evaluations of the other proposals will not be discussed. Debriefings may be conducted in person or on the telephone, at the Library's discretion.

Win or Lose – Always ask for a Debrief

If you won

- Did you win by a large margin, or barely?
- What were the strengths and weaknesses about your proposal?

If you lost

- Excellent opportunity to find out where your offer was deficient
- What could have been better? What do I need to do to ensure I get the next award?
- Pitch as a back-up to the awardee

You should ask for a debriefing ASAP

OVERWHELMED?



Today's to do list.

HELP IS AVAILABLE!



- ❑ In depth, quality, one-on-one counseling is available **free of charge** from the Small Business Development Center!
- We can assist you with anything related to government contracting and proposal writing, market research, business plan development, loan packaging
- SBDC offers free workshops www.farmingdale.edu/sbdc

Thank You!

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