

RFP Evaluation Guide

In the case of competitive proposals, a technical proposal is solicited that explains how the prospective contractor will meet the objectives of the solicitation and a cost element that identifies the costs to accomplish the technical proposal. When conducting a Request for Proposal (RFP), the School Food Authority (SFA) will need to determine the objectives and goals they want to accomplish through this solicitation and final contract. The objectives and goals will need to be clearly defined by the SFA and the SFA will need to determine what information and/or documentation they will require in order to conduct a consistent evaluation of each proposal. The evaluation will be utilized to determine the proposer's ability to meet the objectives and goals of the solicitation and will be used to evaluate the costs associated with each proposal.

RFPs must be thoroughly reviewed and subjected to an impartial evaluation. While price alone is not the sole basis for award, price remains the **primary consideration** when awarding a contract under the competitive proposal method. An evaluation and scoring plan must be developed solely by the SFA and must be included in the solicitation prior to the receipt of any proposals. Among the items that would be included in that plan are:

- **Information on Evaluation Team/Scoring Committee**—the size of the evaluation team/scoring committee, the expertise needed on that team, and the names of the team members. It is recommended that a lead is assigned and that is the evaluation team/scoring committee expert/lead on procurement that is employed by the SFA. The lead would also train the evaluation team on the objectives/goals, scoring criteria, documentation/information and the scoring forms/rubric/process.
- **Scoring System**—the scoring system that will be used to evaluate the proposals. This would include, but not limited to, the standards to be applied, how each individual team member will evaluate/score each criterion, what (if any) documentation and/or information is required to determine the score for each criterion, the relative ranking and weight of each standard, and how the score will be calculated i.e., the sum of the individual team scores or an average of the total team score. Again, price remains the primary consideration when awarding a contract under the competitive proposal method.
- **Ancillary Materials**—development of scoring sheets, composite scoring forms, and any other forms or letters that may be needed. The scoring sheets should contain the evaluation criteria, standards to be applied, scoring columns and room for comments.

The individuals who will be evaluating the proposals should have sufficient knowledge of the goals of the SFA, experience in school food service, financial management experience (of food service, if possible), and experience in evaluating proposals.

Proposals must not be opened or reviewed until after the due date established in the RFP. The person responsible for receiving the proposals must safeguard them in order to prevent unauthorized disclosures. It is recommended that all solicitations remain open for a minimum of 45- 60 days to allow vendors sufficient time to respond and to promote fair and open competition.

On the date established for opening and evaluating the proposals, each member of the evaluation team should score each proposal independently. If the RFP allows alternative proposals, care must be taken to

ensure these address the basic guidelines established in the RFP. Proposals should not be compared to one another. Proposals that fail to address all requirements are unresponsive and cannot receive further consideration. Therefore, the team members should be instructed to use a pass-or-fail basis for eliminating unresponsive proposals, and then use the pre-established scoring system for evaluating the responsive proposals.

If oral presentations are a component of the RFP, great care must be taken to ensure the presentation is scored only for its content. Presentations must be ranked against measurable standards. The team members should be instructed to evaluate the substance of the presentation. Offerors must not be allowed to alter or amend their proposals through the presentation process.

Proposals must be evaluated using the weighted criteria stated in the RFP. A determination must be made by the SFA as to whether the proposal is responsive to the requirements of the solicitation and whether or not they are responsible and capable of furnishing the goods and services solicited. Contractor integrity, compliance with public policy, record of past performance and financial and technical resources are valid factors in determining contractor responsibility. **SFAs must not change or by-pass the published evaluation and scoring criteria in order to circumvent full and open competition.** It is recommended that the SFA work with their legal to create a Conflict of Interest and a Confidentiality Statement and require all members of the evaluation team/scoring committee.