Request for Proposal (RFP) Checklist

Develop a detailed outline for the implementation RFP. Feedback should then be solicited from the appropriate project staff and modifications made as necessary. Within legal limitations, the RFP should include, but not be limited to, the following:

- √ **Background and Project Overview**, including clear descriptive text with appropriate background about your state, HIE in the state, legislative need or applicable regulations, and the specific project about which the RFP is being released. Include references to appropriate statewide plans and other documents.
- √ **Bidders Instructions** about the process and timeline of the RFP, including the format and organization of the bidder's response
- √ **Scope of Work**: clear instructions documenting exactly what you want the bidder to do, and over what period of time. This may include specific deliverables (documents or technology deployment phases). Specific information should include:
  - o A clear and concise description of the work to be performed, services to be provided, problem to be solved, and the goals and objectives to be met. This should refer back to the Background and Project Overview section clearly;
  - o An explanation, in realistic terms, of what the Vendor is expected to accomplish, including the desired approach to the problem and the specific functions, tasks, and activities that must be performed;
  - o Business (functional) requirements – this might include use cases, often listed as "required" and "optional", user training/support, and documentation;
  - o Technical requirements and specifications, including any policy, procedure and standards with which solution/application must comply;
  - o Legal and state policy limitations;
  - o Established performance timelines, completion dates, and methods of measurement;
  - o A description of the items, products and results to be delivered and method of validation;
  - o The extent and nature of the assistance, cooperation and communication approaches with your staff (and other participating entities such as other vendors, provider liaisons, etc.) that will be available to the Vendor;
  - o Available documents and resource materials including links to state websites,
- √ **Selection Criteria**, including the specific factors and procurement rules (where applicable) that will be considered by the evaluation team when considering proposals (written proposal, cost estimate, demonstrations, customer references, staffing, etc.). You might also include the weight being given to each major factor.
- √ **Timeline**, including
  - o Submission timetable;
  - o Period and process for asking questions and posting responses (often includes a bidders' conference to provide information to interested applicants).
- √ **Proposal checklist**: This can be very useful to help bidders avoid forgetting any required information in their bids, and to help you keep track as well!

Some additional topics to be addressed within the sections listed above might include, but not be limited to, the following:

- √ **Company background**: General information about the company, including its mission, activities, financial stability and industry-related experience;
- √ **Functional, technical, and performance requirements**: These may include detailed requirements (often included in one or more appendix) related to how the proposed system would achieve programmatically (functional), how it might achieve it (technical), and the expectations of how the technology performs (e.g., number of users, transaction volumes, response time, up time);
- √ **Schedule constraints**: Detailed expectations about how the project should unfold and the expected timetable for the bidder's completion of the project's requirements and deliverables;
- √ **Bidder qualifications and references**: Both descriptive text about the bidder's past experience as well as customer references related to relevant past work;
- √ **Personnel requirements and expectations**: Details about expectations for key staff in terms of their background and qualifications related to this project, physical presence in your jurisdiction, their current availability, and time to be spent on the project;
- √ **Project management requirements**: Details about how you expect the bidder to interact with you if selected;
- √ **Compliance with any special requirements**, including equal opportunity / affirmative action business contracting requirements or similar regulations, requirements for liability coverage, assurances to meet state / federal "flow-down" requirements (including review / release of funds by ONC). Some provide sample contract, requirements for liability coverage, assurances to meet state / federal flow-down requirements (including review / release of funding by ONC).

Other useful tips:

- √ A thorough and objective review of the RFP should be conducted by staff members who are not primary members of the project team. With their fresh perspective, they will provide feedback to the project manager about the strengths and weaknesses of the RFP who will take any necessary action to improve upon any identified weaknesses.
- √ Publish the official RFP as an Adobe Acrobat document, but provide the text in Microsoft Word format (and tables in Microsoft Excel format if relevant) to facilitate responses by the bidders. Ensure the website provides a link to download a free Adobe Acrobat reader for first time users.
- √ Allow at least a week from the release of the RFP before a bidder's conference is held (if you choose to hold one). If possible, allow dial-in for prospective bidder's to promote the widest possible set of participants as possible. Written questions should be accepted up until the day before the bidder's conference to allow time for them to be reviewed, and prospective vendors should be encouraged to submit questions as early as possible to permit time for them to be reviewed and answered at the bidder's conference. The goal should be to respond to all questions submitted by the deadline, as well as all questions asked during the bidder's conference, together in writing as soon as feasible. It is also common that minor procedural questions may arise as vendors are working hard to finish their proposals (e.g., clarifications about page limits or standard forms). Prospective vendors should be allowed to ask these clarifying questions via e-mail with no guarantee that you will respond to these questions at all. However, if you choose to respond, it will be done in the form of an amendment to the RFP.
- √ Allow at least four weeks from the bidder's conference (if one is held) to the due date of the RFP.
- √ Allow at least two weeks (and if possible more) from the time bidder's questions are answered to the due date of the RFP.

- √ If possible, vendors should be allowed to ask additional clarifying questions *based on the responses to the official bidders questions only* via e-mail, with no guarantee that you will respond to these questions at all.
- √ Bidder meetings/demonstrations can be a useful way to meet key staff proposed for a project, to see products being proposed up close, and to seek clarification of elements of a proposal.
- √ Many proposals will contain multi-vendor teams, partnerships, or subcontractors. Be sure you are absolutely clear on the extent of the vendors' prior relationship and partnerships, exactly which vendor is responsible for what activities, and the prime vendor's plan for coordination with other participating companies or organizations. Letters of commitment signed by authorized decision-makers are recommended, as well as information about previous partnerships and successful implementations by the team of partner organizations.
- √ Develop a publicity plan for the RFP. Often overlooked, this plan will identify the strategies that will be used to publicize the existence of the RFP to the vendor community to ensure an appropriate set of responses. Elements of this strategy might include:

    - More prominent highlight of the RFP on your website(s)
    - Issuance of a press release
    - Targeted e-mails or telephone calls to prospective bidders (if policy permits)
    - Targeted e-mails to HIT/HIE-related email lists
    - Notification to HIT/HIE membership organizations for publicity to their members through e-mail or newsletters
    - Process and language to notify applicants of decisions at each step of the process (applicants who do not meet minimum qualifying criteria; applicants not selected for further evaluation; applicants not selected for award of contract).
    - Communications to keep your organization, evaluation team, and partners apprised of the status and progress in awarding of contract.

Common Questions:

Here are some additional issues and important questions always asked by vendors. The degree to which you can anticipate and answer these questions within the RFP text will assist vendors in quickly evaluating the RFP and their interest in responding:

- *Is there a project budget for this project?* It is always helpful to answer this outright in the RFP if the project is for a fixed price. If the budget cannot be disclosed based on the type of contracting arrangement, then this should be identified up front and the vendors should be informed. .

- *Can we get a copy of the RFP in Word to facilitate our response?* We strongly recommends posting the RFP on an official state or vendor website, both as an Acrobat file (the official version) and in Word (to facilitate response) *before* the vendors ask for it. Post any tables you want in Excel for the same purpose.

- Many proposals will contain multi-vendor teams, partnerships, or subcontractors. Be sure to request that bidders are *absolutely clear* on the extent of the vendors' prior relationship and partnerships, exactly which vendor is responsible for what activities, and the prime vendor's plan for coordination with other participating companies or organizations. Bids are often quite ambiguous on these issues – it is important to understand exactly who is supplying the products and key staff. Include a reminder that failure to provide complete disclosures could result in a rejection of the proposal.

- It may be useful to clearly define a set of *mandatory requirements* against which proposals can be judged when initially received. Failure of any mandatory requirements would result in the disqualification of the proposal. A subset of the evaluation team could be assigned to do this initial, straightforward review to determine which proposals are eligible to proceed.

- *What is the timeframe for the decision*? It is useful to give your anticipated timeline, but be sure to state that timeframes may change due to variables in the evaluation and / or contract negotiation process. It should be noted that the decision process will be transparent and notification will be provided in a timely manner as explained in the RFP.

Appendix: Evaluation Methodologies

There are a variety of methodologies that can be selected for bid evaluation. Some are more rigid than others. In all cases, the purpose of the methodology is to maintain fairness in the bidding process. Some jurisdictions or organizations proscribe specific methodologies so if that is the case projects must abide by those requirements. Specific methodologies to consider include:

- **Least Cost of Acceptable Alternatives:** In this method, a set of baseline (or minimum) requirements are described in the RFP. Bidders are evaluated based on their ability to meet these baseline requirements. Of the set of vendors who meet the requirements, a contract is pursued with the least-cost vendor.

  Advantages:
  - Evaluation rules are very clear and unambiguous
  - Drives vendors to be very price competitive in tough economic times

  Disadvantages:
  - Very rigid system: does not allow for important variations in solutions beyond cost to be considered
  - Does not allow for a superior, but potentially more expensive solution to be selected over a cheaper solution that meets the minimum requirements

- **Detailed Scoring:** In this method, jurisdictions prepared a detailed scoring template covering every aspect of the proposal and the specific factors related to each requirement. A scoring system is also developed. Weights are then assigned to each factor by agreement of the project team. During proposal review, each team member scores each proposal and the sums of the scores are tabulated and summed to determine the successful bidder.

  Advantages:
  - Evaluation rules are clear and unambiguous
  - Many factors including cost enter into the selection decision

  Disadvantages:
  - Differences in interpretation may yield wide varieties in scoring
  - Leaves no room for exceptions to the scoring formula due to exceptional elements of a proposal or other special circumstances
  - All proposals needs to be fully evaluated by all team members regardless of likelihood of success

- **Best Value:** In this method, proposals are evaluated on a set of clearly identified measures, but cost is not the driving determining factor. All measures are considered and the proposal that demonstrates the "best value" to the jurisdiction – the strongest solution relative to its cost – is pursed for a contract.

Advantages:

- Many factors other than cost can enter into the selection decision
- Variations in proposed solutions can be considered
- Flexible enough for complex or non-traditional projects where wide variations in bidder's approach may be expected
- Allows for sorting of proposals into categories based on initial review with the potential to focus in on more acceptable proposals only for extensive review. If the RFP yields many responses this is one way to save time and focus on the best possible alternatives.

Disadvantage:

- Recommendations and decisions may appear to be subjective

The Best Value approach to RFP evaluation is often preferred, as it offers a good balance of structure and flexibility in arriving at the best choice in a complex procurement. Once the evaluation method is selected, appropriate tools and guides should be developed to explain and teach the methodology.