
MODULE 5 - BID DOCUMENTS: INTERPRETING AN RFP

- › Overview of the Request for Proposal (RFP)
- › Understanding the components of an RFP
- › Read it once, Read it twice

What's in an RFP Document?

The purpose of this module is to provide a brief overview of a Request for Proposal document and highlight some of its key components.

OVERVIEW OF THE REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL (RFP)

As mentioned in Module 4 the Request for Proposal (RFP) is probably the most common form of bid that is used by government and by VANOC. The RFP will usually explain:

- › the role of the buying agency
- › the background of the project
- › some of the issues the buying agency is facing
- › the scope of the project
- › the parameters for submission of solutions.

It will also describe how proposals will be evaluated and state some of the terms and conditions for proposal acceptance and contract award and it will tell you to whom you should address questions.

UNDERSTANDING THE COMPONENTS OF AN RFP

The following are usually the key components of an RFP:

Cover Page – typically provides the name of the buying organization (who is issuing the RFP), the closing time and a contact person if you have questions. Note the closing time as this is a critical piece of information.

Introduction – provides some brief background on the organization that is making the purchase and some context around the products or services they are seeking.

Project Details and Scope of Work – a detailed explanation of the project and any specific information around product or service specifications, design or pricing guidelines and any key dates relating to the project schedule.

RFP Process – this section will provide very specific information relating to the overall process for the RFP including any requirements to indicate that you will be bidding, to whom and how to make enquiries, closing time and location, how late proposals or proposals that don't meet mandatory criteria will be handled, information meetings for bidding companies (if any), legal issues (e.g. conflict of interest), evaluation and selection process and any information relating to contract negotiations.

Proposal Preparation – this is a set of very specific instructions to bidding companies on aspects of the proposal preparation; including providing guidance to bidding companies on issues such as joint proposals (two companies bidding together), expenses for proposal preparation, liability, completeness of proposal, etc.

Additional Terms – often there is a legal section that deals specifically with any additional terms related to the proposal such as acceptance or rejection of proposals, contract issues, issues around solicitation, etc.

Evaluation Criteria – usually there is a specific section that details the evaluation criteria that will be used to select a winning bid. There are mandatory criteria that must be met to even review the proposal and then additional or desirable criteria that will be factored into the final decision.

Proposal Contents and Format – this is a very detailed and specific set of instructions on exactly how the proposal should be formatted including which sections need to be included, their sequencing, how many pages can be used to provide a response and potentially even a preformatted letter to be signed and returned as a cover letter for the proposal.

Appendices – any other additional information, specifications, background reports or related documentation may be included in one or more appendices.

Note: Appendix D of this Workbook tells you where you can find an actual sample RFP used by the Vancouver Organizing Committee.

READ IT ONCE, READ IT TWICE

You will be amazed at what you find. All together you can expect even a simple RFP from a government agency or from VANOC can easily run up to 20 pages in total length. All the information is critical – so as you can see – you need to devote a fair amount of time just to read the RFP.

Remember – buyers will sometimes be very specific about their requirements and how you need to respond. It is highly recommended that you read the RFP a few times to ensure you've noted all the critical content. Often it's a good idea to have more than one person read the document to ensure that all the important details are noted and nothing has been missed. You'd be surprised how frequently one person will catch something another person hadn't thought was important.

Module 6 will provide an overview of the considerations involved in deciding when to respond to a RFP.