# Request for Proposal/Request for Bid Guidelines

**1.0** Purpose

These guidelines outline the preparation and evaluation of an Invitation for Bid (IFB)/Request for Proposal (RFP). The guidelines are effective from the current date until revised

**2.0** Definitions

2.1 Illinois Procurement Code (30 ILCS 000/)

The Code was established July 1, 1998 and has been revised periodically. The Code is built on the principles of competitive bidding, as well as equity and fairness in the consideration of vendors' offerings. The Code includes the Procurement Rules of the Chief Procurement Officer for Public Institutions of Higher Education (44 Ill. Admin. Code 4).

2.2 Request for Proposal

Request for proposal is the process of requesting vendors' capabilities and pricing based on Northern Illinois University's requirements, - when price may not be the primary consideration and those requirements may require discussions with competing offerors, changes in proposals, including price, and/or the need for comparative judgmental evaluations to determine the most advantageous offer.

2.3 Invitation for Bid

Invitation for Bid is the process of selecting a vendor based on Northern Illinois University's defined requirements. Bids are opened in a public forum, with all bidders invited, if not present. The choice of vendor is based on price only, with the vendor's written assurance it is capable of fulfilling the requirements.

2.4 Sourcing Team

A sourcing team consists of the primary stakeholders who will use, manage and/or direct the results of the RFP or bid, as well as the Procurement Services professional facilitating the proposal/bid.

**3.0** Timelines for Processing RFPs and IFBs

Procurements above the bid limit (see Policies and Procedures on the Procurement Services webpage at http://qa2.niu.edu/procurement2/rules-process/policies-procedures.shtml) require a formal buying process. The timelines provided to follow are offered as a guide only. Depending on the complexity of the purchase, times may vary, less or more, than indicated below.

3.1 INVITATION FOR BID (IFB): Estimated timeframe: 3-6 months.

An Invitation for Bid is a formal competitive solicitation and a public opening is conducted at the time and date specified in the IFB. Vendors' responses are evaluated and the award goes to the responsive, responsible bidder with the lowest price. Price and specification requests are major considerations in the award process.

3.2 REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL (RFP): Estimated total timeframe: 6-9 months

This procurement is used when the specifications are complex or the requestor is seeking vendors' proposed solutions. It can often take a considerable amount of time to complete all of the steps involved, especially for a complex RFP.

An estimated timeframe follows. Some of these steps are concurrent:

1. Evaluation of the planned project *(1-3 months)*

2. Writing specifications for the RFP and criteria for evaluation *(2-3 months or more)*

3. Research potential vendor pool *(one to three weeks)*

4. Publish the RFP *(Min. 15 days or longer* depending on the complexity and inclusion of any pre-bid conferences)

6. Vendor response time *(2-4 weeks)*

7. Evaluation of vendor proposals and rank vendors *(2-6 months)*

8. Vendor selection *(one day to day week)*

10. Contract development*(two to four months)*

**4.0** Roles

4.1 The Procurement Policy Board (PPB) has authority and responsibility to review, comment upon, and recommend, consistent with the Procurement Code, awards recommended by Illinois public institutions, including universities. The PPB is allowed thirty (30) days to review contract rules and practices governing the procurement, management, control, and disposition of supplies, services, professional and artistic services, construction, and real property and capital improvement leases procured by the State

4.2 The Chief Procurement Officer (CPO) is responsible for exercising all procurement authority created by the Illinois Procurement Code.

4.3 The State Procurement Officer (SPO) is appointed by the CPO to enforce the Procurement Code, and has general direct oversight of the procurement activities of the University purchasing staff including giving approval to proceed at various stages of the process.

4.4 Buyer, Senior Buyer, Procurement Officer I, II and III are the titles given to purchasers at Northern Illinois University responsible for procurement of goods and services, under the requirements of the Illinois Procurement Code and Northern Illinois University's Board of Trustees.

## **5.0.** RFP Process

The SPO has provided a template for developing a RFP. The primary sections are:

5.1

5.1.1 Scope of work, the evaluation criteria and the technical specifications.

The scope of work is an abstract of the technical specifications. This section contains a summary of requirements and specifications, along with timing and delivery requirements. The technical requirements are listed in this section.

5.1.2 The evaluation criteria.

This evaluation section contains the metrics with which the RFP results will be evaluated. Clear, concise requirements often lead to clear responses from vendors and a solid framework for evaluation. A solid evaluation will, most likely, reduce challenges from competitive vendors and from the CPO or SPO. Points, indicating relative importance, are assigned to each requirement, including pricing. *The evaluation must be based solely on the evaluation factors stated in the RFP.*

5.1.3 Technical requirements or specifications

The requirements (usually applied to services) or specifications (usually applied to products or goods) can include the following:

- Dimensions
- Service level agreements (SLAs)
- Delivery needs: timing, location, any freight or packaging customizations, storage
- Warranties
- Training, both initial and ongoing. Onsite? Webinar? Attendance minimums or maximums? Costs? Prior knowledge expected from attendants?
- Project implementation expectations
- Performance
- Adherence to specifications (or allowance for substitutions)
- Data migration
- Customer references. The customers should be similar to Northern Illinois University
- Do we expect onsite demonstrations, or are presentations required?
- Will we visit customer locations?
- Detailed technical specifications for the item requested
- Outline of the services requested/required.
- Samples of product or work, if needed.

5.1.4 Pre-bid/Proposal Process

Pre-bid/proposal meetings and/or site visits (if required due to the complexity of the project associated with the IFB/RFP), may be required to ensure fairness in the process through receipt of the same information at one time. The meetings may be voluntary or mandatory. A specific time, date and location for the meeting are given in the IFB/RFP. Usually, the meeting will be at least one (1) week before the opening of the IFB/RFP. Materials and specifications are covered in detail, and vendors are allowed to ask specific questions, with all present receiving the same responses. If addenda to the IFB/RFP are needed after the meeting, the addenda are developed and posted to the Procurement Bulletin in a separate document which becomes part of the final IFB/RFP response.

5.1.5 Subcontractors

If subcontractors are allowed in the proposal, the vendor must disclose if $50,000 or over of the work performed will be done by the subcontractor. If so, and the vendor using the subcontractor is chosen, the subcontractor must be prepared to submit information on hourly rates, hours worked, and the specific work performed as part of the invoices the vendor submits during the project.

**6.0** Invitation for Bid

A competitive sealed bid is the required method of source selection, unless otherwise allowed in the Code or Rules.

6.1 A bid is awarded to the lowest responsible, responsive bidder. Included in the determination of a responsive bidder is the acceptability of the product or service as designated in the IFB.

While similar to a request for proposal, an IFB does not include an evaluation matrix. All evaluation factors are to be included in the specifications. Determination of acceptability of a product or service can only be made based on the specifications included in the IFB.

An invitation to bid and a RFP diverge in the evaluation of pricing.

6.1.1 Bidders' offerings are not ranked comparatively. An evaluation of the low bid offering is made only to determine if the product or service meets the specifications as included in the IFB, not to compare the offerings of bidders.

6.1.2 Pricing generated from an invitation to bid is opened publicly, with all bidders (or those who attend the published bid opening) present. The prices are announced, and bidders know the results at the bid opening.

**7.0** Certifications and Disclosures

All respondents, whether responding to an Invitation to bid or RFP, must be certified with the State of Illinois as a vendor or contractor. They must also complete the certifications and financial disclosures that are included with the bid or RFP forms.

Exclusions or objections to the certifications or disclosures may be considered, or may disqualify the respondent.

**8.0** Review by the SPO

After Northern Illinois University's buyer constructs the final draft of the RFP or bid, the Buyer sends it (via email) to the SPO for review. The SPO may require revisions. Once the Buyer and SPO have agreed on the final version, the SPO posts the RFP/bid to the Illinois Procurement Bulletin.

**9.0** Evaluation; Award

Upon completion of evaluations, the sourcing team issues recommendations for award, which are then sent to the SPO for review and posting on the Illinois Procurement Bulletin. If the SPO objects to the evaluation criteria due to questionable consideration of the bid/RFP, the SPO may require re-evaluation or may declare no-award.

If the SPO agrees with the evaluation and award, the SPO posts the award notification on the Illinois Procurement Bulletin. The PPB then has thirty (30) days to review and approve the award, or the PPB may waive its rights to review. The award is then official.

**10.0** Vendor Disqualification

Vendors who are responding to IFB/RFP will have their bids/proposals rejected and disqualified from award for any of the following reasons. The list below is not all-inclusive:

- Failure to complete the Illinois Certification and Financial Disclosure forms
- Receiving the IFB/RFP by any other means than accessing through the Illinois Procurement Bulletin, or through a broker who is certified under the requirements of the Illinois Procurement Bulletin
- Not responding to a mandatory pre-bid/proposal meeting
- Evidence of collusion with other vendors in responding to the IFB/RFP
- Coaching on the bid/proposal response, received by the vendor from a NIU employee
- Any other fraudulent act associated with the bid/proposal response.

**11.0** Ethics; Equity; Fairness

In the interests of fairness and to maintain equal opportunities for all potential respondents, no communication is to be shared with vendors about a specific project on which the vendor could subsequently quote. During the active RFP/bid period, i.e., after posting on the Illinois Procurement Bulletin through the award to a chosen vendor, only the Buyer may have contact with the vendor.

The Procurement Code is very specific in excluding vendors that have assisted the University in the formation of the RFP, prior to the posting of the RFP. Assistance may not be provided by anyone within

the vendor's business, which includes ". . . *all individuals with whom a business is affiliated, including, but not limited to, any officer, agent, employee, consultant, independent contractor, director, partner, manager or shareholder of a business.* [30 ILCS 500/50-10.5(e)]."

The Code prohibits ". . . any person or business from submitting a bid or proposal or entering into a contract if the person or business assisted a university in determining whether there was a need for a contract or assisted a university by reviewing, drafting or preparing any IFB [Invitation to Bid], RFP or RFI [Request for Information] or provided similar assistance."

**12.0** Sole Source

A sole source may result from the RFP process, or may be determined prior to the RFP due to the sole source vendor being the incumbent provider, or the RFP result determines a sole source vendor is required. In either case, the SPO and CPO must agree that the sole source is justified. The Sole Source form is available on the Illinois Procurement Gateway for the CPO of Higher Education: https://www.illinois.gov/ppb/Documents/Sole%20Source%20Justification%20Form.pdf.

There are two types of sole sources.

12.1 Sole Source (no other vendor can supply the product and/or services), and

12.2 Sole Economically Feasible Source (there are other available vendors; however, the proposed vendor offers the best pricing).