

THE RFP TEMPLATE

Using the OSP Templates

The OSP templates contain the basic, OSP-approved contractual terms that are essential to a resultant procurement contract for Arkansas.

Downloading the appropriate solicitation template will:

1. Eliminate the time and effort of re-creating the contractual terms for each procurement.
2. Ensure you are conforming to the most current Arkansas procurement laws in your solicitation.
3. Provide the standard formatting and language that the State has adopted for its solicitations.

REMINDER

It is important that you download a new template from the OSP website for each solicitation you create because the language for the contractual terms are updated by OSP as procurement laws and directives change.

Solicitation templates consist of two documents:

1. A solicitation document.
 - This provides the State's contractual terms to the prospective contractor.
 - It is a key document in the final procurement contract.
2. A response document.
 - This contains the documents and forms that the prospective contractor completes and returns to the State as their response submission.
 - The requested information mainly consists of the company information, bid price, other required documentation as requested in the RFP, and for RFPs, the proposed technical solution (proposal).

The buyer inserts the detailed specifications and requirements of the commodity or service into the appropriate section of the solicitation document. This includes contractual terms such as delivery requirements, contract renewal options, and/or information for submitting any supplemental documents with the bid.

Creating a Solicitation

Two types of information are included in a solicitation document:

1. Specifications and/or requirements for the commodity or service being purchased.
 - Specifications and requirements are provided by the end user. The buyer ensures they are written correctly, presented appropriately, and inserted in the designated section of the solicitation template.
2. Contractual terms applicable to a resultant contract.
 - This is the standard Arkansas procurement language provided in the remaining sections of the solicitation template, or as referenced by a link in the template that will take the prospective contractor to the OSP webpage where the standard terms and conditions are posted.

The templates prompt you to enter, confirm, or update specific information in the documents by displaying that text and/or instructions in a blue font.

HELPFUL HINT

The terms “specifications” and “requirements” are often used interchangeably; however, a specification is typically used to describe the mandatory physical or functional aspects of a commodity, whereas a requirement typically defines a mandatory aspect of the provision of a service.

REMINDER

Thoroughly read both template documents in their entirety and make adjustments as necessary to fit *your* procurement.

The Request for Proposal (RFP) Template

The two documents that constitute the RFP template are called:

1. The RFP Solicitation document.
2. The Technical Proposal Packet.

The RFP solicitation template is divided into a front page and three sections thereafter. The front page of the solicitation provides the following basic information to the prospective contractor.

- Bid Number – The number used to identify the solicitation, typically provided by your supervisor.

- Solicitation Issued – The date the solicitation is publicly posted.
- Description – The short description/title of the commodity or service being purchased.
- Agency – The formal name of the State agency who is issuing the solicitation.
- Proposal Opening Date and Time – The due date for response packets to be submitted to your agency and time of the public opening of proposals.
- Instructions for how to submit the response packet.
- Buyer name and contact information.

The three internal sections of the RFP solicitation are:

Section 1: General Information and Instructions

- Provides information that the prospective contractor must know in order to submit their response correctly.
- Covers contractual terms that will be applicable to a resulting contract.
- Includes the necessary language with prompts for the buyer to enter appropriate data elements for your specific procurement.

Section 2: Specifications

- Provides the objective, the goals of the work to be performed, and the scope of work.
- Provides information about the performance standards (for services only).

Section 3: Selection

- Explains the process for evaluating the submissions and selecting a successful contractor.

How to Create Your RFP Solicitation

Once you download these templates, the main items you will need to deal with will be entering the specification information in the correct sections and addressing items in blue font.

Buyer's Action Steps for the Front Page

The buyer's action steps for completing the front page are to:

1. Update the document heading and all titles and references on the page to reflect *your* office information.
2. Enter the Bid Number provided by your supervisor.

3. Enter the Description, a simple name for the commodity/service being purchased to make it easily identifiable by all parties.
4. Enter the date that the solicitation will be issued (publicly posted).
5. Check with the end user to help determine the due date for submissions and fill in the Opening Date and Time.
 - Some commodities/services may take longer for a prospective contractor to determine a bid price.
6. Update the delivery address for the responses.
7. Enter your contact information and your agency's contact information and website.

Buyer's Action Steps for Section 1

The buyer's action steps for completing Section 1 are to thoroughly read the entire section and make updates and/or additions to the language as necessary to customize the information to fit *your* purchase and *your* agency.

The blue font in the template will help guide you to where the information needs to be confirmed, adjusted, or entered.

The numbering for the items in this section appear as 1.1, 1.2, etc.

Be sure to address the following items.

1.1 Introduction

It is important that the introduction (item 1.1 in Section 1) clearly and briefly states what the State agency is purchasing.

Examples of a clear and concise purpose statement are:

"This Request for Proposal (RFP) is issued by the Employee Benefits Division (EBD) of the Department of Transformation and Shared Services (TSS) to obtain pricing and a contract for printing, packaging, and delivery of Employee Health Benefits Identification Cards."

OR

"This Request for Proposal (RFP) is issued by the Arkansas Department of Finance and Administration (DFA) to obtain pricing and a contract for pest control services for DFA offices in central Arkansas."

1.2 Live Bid Opening

Enter your agency's information regarding your bid openings. See your supervisor for direction on your agency's procedure for this.

1.3 Type of Contract

Stipulating the type of contract advises prospective contractors of the length of the initial contract term and if there will be renewal options for additional terms. Adjust this language to fit your contract needs.

Address the following and update as needed:

- Item A language almost always remains as written stating a “single contractor”.
 - Awarding to more than one contractor for the *exact same* commodity or service requires approval from the OSP Director. See your supervisor if you anticipate that you may need to award to more than one contractor.
- Item B prompts the buyer to enter a start date for a resulting contract. The date you enter is the “anticipated” date, meaning it could be moved out based on the needs of the State.
- Item C provides the prospective contractor with information regarding the length of the initial contract term, which is typically one year, and information regarding renewal options.

For more information on determining contract dates and setting contract renewal terms, go to the link for ***Firm and Term Contracts and Contract Renewal Options***.

1.4 Solicitation Schedule

The solicitation schedule provides prospective contractors information to communicate a tentative timeframe for the solicitation. Providing the solicitation schedule to prospective contractors typically cuts down on the number of phone calls received by the buyers.

The solicitation schedule may be adjusted when creating the RFP to fit the needs of your solicitation and/or agency. Some buyers add additional information to the tentative solicitation schedule, such as evaluation timeframe, and ALC Review (for services).

if the activity requires a specific time, such as proposal due date and time, it is important to remember to add the time along with the date.

For dates that are tentative, add an asterisk (*) to signify that the dates are “anticipated dates only” and are subject to change at the discretion of the State. See Table A for an example of what is in the RFP template. If assistance is needed with setting the dates and/or times, see your supervisor.

TABLE A: TENTATIVE SOLICITATION SCHEDULE

ACTIVITY	DATE
RFP Release to Prospective Contractors	
Deadline for Prospective Contractor Questions	Date, time CST
Answers to Questions Posted to OSP website*	
Proposal Due Date	Date, time CST
Oral Presentations/Demonstrations*	
Post Anticipation to Award*	
Award Contract*	

1.5 Clarification of Bid Solicitation

Prospective contractors sometimes have questions regarding a solicitation, especially for the complex ones. Often, the solicitation allows for the formal submission of questions, and the buyer will prepare a Q&A document to be added to the bid posting which consolidates all the questions and provides answers.

In the solicitation, enter the time and date deadline for prospective contractors to submit questions regarding the bid.

The Question and Answer (Q&A) Document

1. To make it clear what the prospective contractor is asking about the solicitation, OSP typically posts a *Submission of Written Questions* form with the bid. Contact an OSP buyer for a copy of this form

The document requests the prospective contractor to fill out information in three columns:

- a. Reference (page number, section number). The section in the bid where the prospective contractor has the question.
- b. Specific RFP Language. The actual language of the section/item for which the prospective contractor has the question.
- c. Question. The prospective contractor enters their question in this column.

The prospective contractor submits the *Submission of Written Questions* form to the buyer.

2. Once the deadline for the questions is reached, the buyer copies all questions into one master list.
3. At this point, the buyer adds a fourth column to the document titled "Response". This is where the State enters its responses to the questions.
 - Typically, the buyer will email the questions to the end user to answer, but sometimes there are questions that are more procurement-related. The buyer can enter the answers for these questions.
 - The buyer should review the end user's answers prior to posting the Q&A to ensure they are appropriate, clear, and applicable to the question.
4. Once the State has written answers to all the questions, the Q&A document is posted to the website as an additional document to the solicitation.

HELPFUL HINTS

- If a prospective contractor asks a question for which an answer appears elsewhere in the solicitation, best practice is to refer the prospective contractor back to the section of the RFP where the answer to the question is located (not repeat the language from the solicitation as the answer).
- If the agency feels that the answer to the question is not necessary for a prospective contractor to know to submit a response (or basically, is irrelevant), the response may be, "This question is not applicable for a Prospective Contractor to submit a responsive bid."

Addenda

If a question is asked that brings about the necessity of changing something in the solicitation, an Addendum is created in addition to the Q&A document.

To obtain a copy of the Addendum template and instruction for creating the document, contact an OSP buyer.

An addendum is usually created for one or more of the following reasons:

- Changing, adding, or deleting a specification, requirement, qualification, or contractual term in the RFP.
- Changing the bid opening date and time.
- Cancelling the bid.

An addendum may be created for other reasons too. See your supervisor for questions about creating an addendum.

Questions Received After the Bid Clarification Deadline:

If a buyer receives a non-substantive question from a prospective contractor after the clarification deadline, typically that type of question may be answered by phone or email without creating and posting a Q&A document. An example of this type of question might be:

How do I seal my response?

Can I bring in my response in person instead of shipping it?

Does my response need to be in any particular type of binder or folder?

If a buyer has any questions about questions received after the clarification deadline, ask your supervisor for direction in how to respond to the prospective contractor.

Question and Answer Timing

Depending upon the complexity of the RFP, prospective contractors are typically given between five and seven calendar days from the posting of the solicitation to submit their question(s) to the buyer.

Also depending on the complexity of the RFP, the agency posts the responses to the questions in three to five business days.

1.6 Definition of Terms

Enter any additional terms relative to your commodity or service.

1.7 Response Documents

If the end user does not want to allow subcontractors, or if the solicitation does not include a commodity or service that would have accessibility concerns, you may delete 1.7.A.3.b.iii and 1.7.A.4.c respectively. (You would also delete the subcontractor page from the response packet.)

In 1.7.B.1, enter the necessary number of copies of the Technical Response Packet you need to have. Count one for each evaluator and one for the buyer.

1.9 Additional Terms and Conditions

The buyer will not make any adjustments or additions to this language but should note that the link provided in this subsection incorporates by reference more contractual terms to the resulting contract.

1.10 Convenience Fee

If the solicitation will not result in a state contract, delete this subsection. Typically, only solicitations issued by OSP result in a state contract.

REMINDER

Remember to click into the header and update the solicitation number.

2.1 Specifications

The buyer will do most of his/her work in this section by developing the specifications provided by the end user and inserting them under this heading. The specifications are critical to obtaining an accurate price quote from a prospective contractor and best value for the State in a resultant contract.

The end user supplies specifications, but the buyer adds value to the procurement by developing the specifications to ensure they:

- Are written correctly and contractually.
- Allow for open competition.
- Are written to obtain best value for the State.

Market research can be key to ensuring the specifications meet these standards. For more information on how market research can help in developing specifications, go to the link for ***Market Research***.

For more information about developing specifications, go to the link for ***Writing Specifications***.

2.2 Performance Standards

Performance standards (A.C.A. § R1:19-11-267) are statements which define the acceptable level of performance by a contractor. By law, they are required in contracts for services with an ICA of at least \$1,000,000 and/or a TPC of \$7,000,000.00 or more; however, it is best practice to include them in *all* service contracts.

For example, a simple one-time service of cutting down a tree can have performance standards for:

- Timeliness in completing the task.
- Quality of clean-up after the job is complete.

For more information about performance standards and instructions on how to create them and add them to your solicitation, go to the link for ***Performance Standards***.

The language in subsection 2.2 should not need to be edited. If performance standards are not included in the solicitation, simply delete the Performance Standards subsection.

Buyer's Action Steps for Section 3

3.1. Technical Proposal Score

For the table in item C, you will fill in the sub-section headings and possible scores in the scoring table *after* the Information for Evaluation section of the technical proposal packet has been completed. These headings must *directly mirror* the headings in the Information for Evaluation section. More instruction is provided on this step later in this manual where the Information for Evaluation section of the response packet is addressed.

In item F, enter the minimum acceptable score/subtotal. Typically, a minimum acceptable score is around 500 to 550 points of the 700 possible. If you require a prospective contractor to meet a certain subtotal per subsection, you can specify those numbers here as well. Be sure not to set the minimum technical score at a restrictive level. If you have questions, see your supervisor or contact an OSP buyer for guidance.

3.2 Oral Presentation/Demonstration Score

In item A, adjust the language as needed to specify how many prospective contractors will move on to the demonstration part of the evaluation. More instruction is provided on this topic later in this manual where the Evaluation Process is addressed.

If you are not requiring demonstrations in your evaluation, you may delete this subsection.

3.3 Cost Score

In item A, enter the specific pricing total points possible (typically 300) that will be used as the number to calculate the score for the cost points. Be extremely clear about the exact dollar figure/table/cell from the price sheet that will be used to calculate the score, especially if you have multiple tables on the price sheet.

3.4 Grand Total Score

Enter the Maximum Points Possible. This will always total 1000 points with the cost weighing at least 30% (300 points).

If an agency wants to weight the cost score lower than 300 points (30%), it must request approval from the State Procurement Director. If approved, the director will provide a written determination that the lower cost score percentage is in the best interest of the State.

The use of a lower cost percentage and the corresponding written determination by the director shall be submitted to the Legislative Council or, if the General Assembly is in session, the Joint Budget Committee, for review *before* the RFP is publicly posted.

3.5 Discussions

Should an agency want to have the option to negotiate the final contract terms or pricing, enter that information in this subsection. There are two allowable types of negotiation for an RFP:

1. Negotiating with the highest-scoring prospective contractor first, then moving the next highest-scoring if negotiation fails with the first. (Similar to IFB negotiations.)
- OR
2. Concurrent negotiation with all prospective contractors who could reasonably be selected for award.

For more information regarding negotiation for RFPs, go to the link for ***Negotiation***.

The Technical Proposal Packet

When issuing an RFP solicitation, you will always provide a technical proposal packet document for prospective contractors to use to submit a proposal.

The basic RFP Technical Proposal Packet consists of:

1. The cover page.
2. The Proposal Signature Page.
3. The Submission Requirements Checklist.
4. The Proposed Subcontractors Form.
5. The Information for Evaluation section.
6. The Exceptions Form.
7. Official Solicitation Price Sheet.

The cover page is simply a page identifying the document. The buyer's action step with the cover page is to replace the SP-XX-XXXX (solicitation number place holder) with the solicitation number that the buyer's agency has assigned to the RFP.

REMINDER

Remember to click into the header of the document and update the solicitation number.

The Proposal Signature Page is a form that is filled out by the prospective contractor to:

- Identify their company and provide contact information.
- Address the matters of a redacted copy of the response, Illegal Immigrant Certification, and Israel Boycott Restriction Confirmation.

- Provide an authorized signature.

HELPFUL HINT

The prospective contractor's signature at the bottom of this page serves as their final contractual signature (unless negotiations occur.)

The Submission Requirements Checklist provides the prospective contractor a quick reference for all required documents that should be included in the response packet. If the VPAT and Proposed Subcontractors Form are not applicable to your solicitation, you can delete these items from the list.

The Proposed Subcontractor Form is provided for prospective contractors to list their subcontractors if subcontracting is allowed and proposed. If the end user does *not* want to allow subcontractors, then the buyer should remove this form from the packet.

The Information for Evaluation section contains the requests for information to which the prospective contractor submits responses. These responses constitute the prospective contractor's technical proposal for how it will provide the required services. Each proposal is evaluated by a committee selected by the agency, and the scoring of the proposal responses constitute the Technical Score (typically 700 points) for the proposal.

The Information for Evaluation questions must illicit information that will help the evaluators distinguish between competing proposals based on the specified performance that will be required under the awarded contract. It's critical that the questions are comprehensive enough that, upon review of the prospective contractor's proposal, the end user/agency can have a clear and thorough picture of how the provision of the services will meet the needs of the State.

The end user, and/or agency stake holders, should provide the criteria to create the questions, but often, a buyer further develops this section through market research. It is the buyer's responsibility to ensure that the Information for Evaluation is complete, accurate, and correctly written; however, the end user who reviews and approves the RFP for posting validates and approves this for the buyer.

Creating the Information for Evaluation

To set up your evaluation criteria/questions, use a table format as shown in the example below. Add lines to the table to include as many questions and headings as needed.

Criteria	Maximum RAW Score Available
E.1 VENDOR QUALIFICATIONS	
A. Detail your organization's ownership history and structure including all separate legal entities and affiliates. Detail any recent acquisitions or liquidations that impacted your organization's operations.	5 points
E.2 GENERAL SERVICES	
A. Provide a description of the skills of the clinical staff, identifying the staff that is utilized for intake and the staff utilized for clinical strategy.	5 points
B. How many members do you currently manage? What is your total capacity?	5 points

The subsection headings (E.1, E.2, etc.) and organization of the subsections should reflect the requirement headings in the RFP. To assist in creating the evaluation questions/headings, have the end user review the finalized requirements and determine what information the prospective contractor should provide regarding the requirements.

Questions must be qualitative or quantitative so that a score can be applied. "Yes/No" questions cannot be used because they cannot be scored in a qualitative or quantitative manner.

Examples of good evaluation questions might be:

- Describe your company's experience working with a State or Federal government entity in this service capacity.
- What percentage of your staff is XYZ certified?
- What method do you use to ensure 100% accuracy of all reported data?
- What is your philosophy and approach for selecting the most profitable investments?
- How do you manage staffing during the heavy work load period of tax season?

Note that the above questions ask to "describe," "explain," "tell how or why," or provide a quantity. Remember that each solicitation is different, so the questions above may or may not fit for a particular solicitation.

It's important to remember that the Information for Evaluation must not contain any requirements or contractual terms (those are provided or referenced in the solicitation document only); therefore, this section should not include any "must" or "shall" statements.

Each criteria/question is always worth a total of 5 points and is scored according to the Scoring Description Table show in Section 3 of the RFP solicitation document.

When you have all your evaluation questions written, group the questions into logical, sub-sectioned headings (like E.1, E.2 above) and create your Information for Evaluation table in the Technical Proposal Packet.

When the Information for Evaluation table in the Response Packet is complete, these subsection headings can now be:

1. Entered in the scoring table in the RFP solicitation Section 3.
2. Weighted by the end user/agency for importance of the sub-section.
3. Used to calculate the scoring table's Possible Scores.

How to Set up an RFP Scoring Table (Solicitation Section 3)

A	B	C	D
Information for Evaluation Sub-Sections	Maximum Raw Points Possible	Sub-Section's Weighted Percentage	* Maximum Weighted Score Possible
E.1 [Sub-Section Heading from Response Packet]	15	15%	105
E.2 [Sub-Section Heading from Response Packet]	75	25%	175
E.3 etc.	25	20%	140
E.4	50	30%	210
E.5	20	10%	70
Technical Score Total	185	100.0%	700

Column A

1. List the sub-section headings here as they are shown in the Information for Evaluation, adding rows as necessary.

Column B

1. The total score for each question in a sub-section is always 5 points.
2. In this example, there are 3 questions in E.1, which gives that category Maximum Raw Points of 15. (3x5)
3. There are 15 questions in E.2, which gives that category Maximum Raw Points of 75. (15x5)
4. Fill in points for all rows.

Column C

1. The end user/agency will decide what percentage weight of the points to give each sub-section depending on its importance.

2. The total of this column must always be 100%.

Column D

1. Total technical points possible (Maximum Weighted Score) for an RFP is 700.
2. If E.1 is worth 15% of 700 points, the Maximum Weighted Score Possible for E.1 is 105. (15% x 700 = 105)
3. Calculate each sub-section's (row's) Weighted Score Possible using the formula of:
Weight % (Col. C) x 700 (Total points) = Max Weighted Score Possible for that row.

The Exceptions Form should be used by the prospective contractor to submit any exception to any of the specifications or contractual terms in the solicitation or in the Standard Commodities Contract Template.

The prospective contractor uses the provided Official Solicitation Price Sheet to submit their bid pricing to ensure that the buyer can compare the bids using a standardized set of pricing data.

Because RFP price sheets are typically very specialized to fit the RFP services, a standard template is not provided. OSP recommends creating a price sheet as an Excel file with formulas that will automatically calculate the total cost as it needs to be reviewed by the buyer and end user.

Creating an RFP Price Sheet

Because the end user (or his/her approving authority) reviews the lowest bid to approve the contractor and pricing prior to award, he/she may request to see the pricing in a particular format.

For example, for services, the end user may want to see the pricing broken down by an hourly cost as opposed to a monthly cost; or, he/she may want to know the flat fee cost of set-up or implementation as well as the subsequent monthly cost for a service; or, he/she may want to see totals for individual service components as well as a grand total for all combined services.

It is the buyer's responsibility to create a price sheet that will:

1. Reflect the pricing format as requested by the end user.
2. Provide a pricing format that is standard for the market and is logically structured to ensure that prospective contractors can prepare a clear and accurate price quote.
3. Ensure a fair and equal comparison of pricing among bid submissions to determine a clearly apparent low bid.

4. Preferably, be automatically totaled as applicable to create a specific cost amount that can be used to easily calculate the cost score for the proposal.

The Excel price sheet will be a separate file from the response packet. This is acceptable as long as they are provided together.

RFP price sheets can be very complex and are typically most functional when they are created in Excel. They may contain multiple pricing tables and/or multiple spreadsheets. Being familiar with Excel and understanding how to create tables and formulas can be critical in creating a practical and efficient price sheet.

Price Sheets should be submitted in a separately sealed envelope for an RFP.

If in doubt about how to create a price sheet to accurately reflect the pricing format your end user requests:

- See your supervisor.
- Contact an OSP buyer for assistance or for possible price sheet examples that may fit your needs.

Finalizing the Solicitation Documents for Posting

When the solicitation and proposal packet documents are final and complete, the end user should closely review and approve the documents for posting. Best practice is for the buyer to provide the final documents to the end user by email, and for the end user to reply by email with approval to post or with any necessary changes.

If changes are requested, the buyer should update the documents and again submit them to the end user for another review and approval. Once the end user approves the documents for posting, the buyer should post the documents on an approved State website.