

RESPONDING TO FEDERAL GOVERNMENT SOLICITATIONS

A Guide for Small Businesses

NH Procurement Technical Assistance Center

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New Hampshire Department of
**BUSINESS AND
ECONOMIC AFFAIRS**

New Hampshire Procurement Technical Assistance Center

www.nheconomy.com/sell-to-the-government



SOLICITATION TYPES

- Sources Sought Notices and RFIs
- Presolicitations
- Request for Bid (a bid will be considered a bona fide offer)
- Request for Quote (a quote usually is not deemed to be a bona fide offer, but an estimate)
- Request for Proposal (usually to be negotiated further, but constitutes a bona fide offer)



CONTRACT TYPES

- Micropurchase (< \$10,000)
- Simplified Acquisition (>\$10K but <\$250K)
- Fixed Price
- Cost Plus
- Indefinite Delivery/Indefinite Quantity (IDIQ)
- Others, including hybrids




Solicitation Strategies:

- Read it
- Read it again
- Mark it up
- Use post-its
- Have some one else read it.



Critical Phases:

- The Bid/No Bid Decision
 - Preparing the Response
 - Post-Award
- 



Step 1 – Skim The Solicitation

- ▶ Look for “deal breakers”
- ▶ Word search on “shall” & “must”
- ▶ Read Sections C, L & M carefully. Take notes, use post-its. This is where you learn what product/service the government is looking for, what must be in your bid/proposal, and how they will evaluate submittals.



PHASE 1 – BID/NO BID

- ▶ You need to make a good decision
- ▶ You need to decide quickly
- ▶ Must have the ability to follow through
 - Time
 - Resources
 - Expertise
- ▶ Competing priorities



DECISION CRITERIA

1. Am I eligible to bid?
2. Is it feasible to bid?
3. Can I deliver the goods or services?
4. Can I compete?
5. Do I want this business?



BIDDER ELIGIBILITY

- ▶ Is it an Open Solicitation?
- ▶ Is it Sole Source?
- ▶ Is the contract Set-Aside?
 - ▶ For holders of existing “master contracts” (MATOC, etc.)
 - ▶ For small business?
 - ▶ Applicable size standards
 - ▶ Special socio-economic categories



BID FEASIBILITY

- Due Date
- Resource availability to -
 - gather, read & digest the bid documents
 - research bid context
 - find partners
 - obtain technical info
 - collect material & subcontract costs
 - attend pre-bid meetings, site visits etc.
 - communicate with procurement staff
 - assess competition



SF 1449

Solicitation/Contract/Order for Commercial Items

Let's look at an example.



SF1442, Solicitation, Offer, and Award

PARTS OF A SOLICITATION

- A. **SOLICITATION/CONTRACT FORM**
- B. SUPPLIES OR SERVICES AND PRICES/COSTS
- C. **DESCRIPTION/SPECS/WORK STATEMENT**
- D. PACKAGING AND MARKING
- E. INSPECTION AND ACCEPTANCE
- F. **DELIVERIES AND PERFORMANCE**
- G. CONTRACT ADMINISTRATION DATA



Section A - KEY INFORMATION

- Solicitation Number –
- Contact Person – phone & email
- Unrestricted – not set-aside
- Type of contract ?
- ? days after award to perform
- NAICS code ???????
- Closing date of ?/?
- Solicitation at <https://www.SAM.gov> under Contract Opportunities



PARTS OF A SOLICITATION

- **H. SPECIAL CONTRACT REQUIREMENTS**
- I. CONTRACT CLAUSES
- **J. LIST OF ATTACHMENTS**
- K. REPRESENTATIONS, CERTIFICATIONS AND OTHER STATEMENTS OF OFFEROR
- **L. INSTRUCTIONS, CONDITIONS AND NOTICES TO OFFERORS**
- **M. EVALUATION FACTORS FOR AWARD**



SELF – ASSESSMENT (Page 1)

- ▶ Assuming I could submit a winning bid, could I perform as required? *Could I make money?*
- ▶ Do I have all of the required expertise/skills?
- ▶ Can I get the necessary materials?
- ▶ Will my company's systems handle the load?
- ▶ What about bonding and/or insurance?
- ▶ Any special licenses or credentials required?
- ▶ What quality systems are necessary?
- ▶ Is cash flow an issue for this project?



SELF – ASSESSMENT (Page 2)

- ▶ Is the job/project right-sized for me?
- ▶ What are the risks? Are they worth it?
- ▶ What are the rewards?
- ▶ How does this contract fit with my short, intermediate and long term goals?
- ▶ Is it consistent with my business plan?
- ▶ Am I prepared for any special requirements?
 - ▶ ITAR
 - ▶ Security clearances
 - ▶ Financial audits



GOVERNMENT PERSPECTIVE

- ▶ Are you responsive?
- ▶ Are you responsible?
- ▶ Do you have suitable past performance?
- ▶ Are you offering the best value?



COMPETITION

- Who are my competitors?
- What do I know about them?
- What more can I learn?
- Do I have a competitive advantage?
- How can I best communicate my advantage?
- If I can't win, I shouldn't play – unless
 - I want experience
 - I want exposure
 - Or, it costs me nothing.



DECISION TIME!

- ▶ I am eligible to bid
- ▶ I can prepare a responsive proposal
- ▶ I can produce the goods/service
 - ▶ On time
 - ▶ With the required level of quality
 - ▶ Within budget
 - ▶ At a reasonable profit
 - ▶ Without “breaking my back”
- ▶ I have a reasonable chance of success against the expected competition



NOW, THE REAL WORK!

- A bid/proposal that is:
 - Responsive
 - Attention-getting
 - Competitive



Read the Solicitation Again, Carefully.

- ▶ Yes, all of it. Even the boring, boilerplate parts
- ▶ Take notes; make lists
- ▶ If multiple people will be working on this, everyone reads all of it, but it's a good idea to split up ultimate responsibilities for the next phase.



RESPONSIVENESS!!!

- ▶ You must provide everything that is asked for.
- ▶ You must give it to them the way they want it.
- ▶ You must comply with any other requirements.
- ▶ You must deliver to the right place, on time, in all the required media.



Competitiveness - Pricing!

- Cost almost always matters
- Do research to understand competitive pricing:
 - www.fpds.gov – history
 - www.SAM.gov – Contract Data
 - www.USASpending.gov – Advanced Search – Awards
 - GSA Advantage
 - [Welcome to GSA Advantage!](#)
 - GSA & VA Schedule Sales Query
 - [FAS Schedule Sales Query Plus \(SSQ+\) | D2D \(gsa.gov\)](#)
 - [VA Schedule Sales Query - Office of Procurement, Acquisition and Logistics \(OPAL\)](#)



So, what's asked for?

- It's all in the solicitation (and associated documents)
- Should include the "Solicitation, Offer and Award" document page, signed.
- Includes acknowledgement of all amendments.
- May include separate or additional "Representations and Certifications", beyond your current SAM
- The burden to be responsive is on you.



How do they want it?

- First step in answering this – re-read the solicitation.
- Take notes, use “sticky notes” or clips to highlight important requirements.
- Make lists of what is required.
- To get some clues as to their perspective, review: M. Evaluation Factors for Award.
- Make sure that it's clear that you satisfy all of their evaluation criteria.
- When in doubt, default to their structure.



OTHER REQUIREMENTS

- ▶ SAM registration is current, correct and complete, including Reqs & Certs.
- ▶ Security clearances?
- ▶ ITAR license?
- ▶ State & local licenses as needed
- ▶ Taxes paid?
- ▶ Not debarred or on the Excluded Parties List
- ▶ PPIRS & FAPIIS up to date & accurate



GETTING THEIR ATTENTION

- Up-front communication
 - Interested parties list
 - Ask intelligent questions
 - Email or telephone, if possible
- Attend pre-bid meetings or site visits
- Understand the bigger picture – history, present and future
- Be on their team! Be a solution!
- **Don't get the wrong kind of attention**



Win the Competition!

- READ the Evaluation Factors for Award
- Your strengths must match their most important evaluation factors.
- The factors are sometimes scored; if not, they are probably in order of priority.
- You must convincingly address all of the evaluation factors.
- You may not propose something other than what is asked for – even if it's better.
 - Except, if it's explicitly allowed.



BID/PROPOSAL DELIVERY

- On or before time and date due
- To the correct person, at the correct address
- Package complete and marked as required by the solicitation.
- Hard copies, electronic submittals, numbers of copies as specified.
- FAX or email only as expressly permitted (or required).
- Get confirmation – from carrier & recipient.



Winning Bids/Proposals are:

- Responsive
 - Complete – contains everything required
 - On time
 - Meets all format requirements
- Clear and simple
- Easy to evaluate
- Competitive

They reflect the competence of their authors, and they inspire confidence.



SUMMARY

- You must be ready.
- You need some basic knowledge of the system(s).
- Must work swiftly, but with accuracy. **Attention to detail is key.
- Strong organization is necessary, or things will fall through the cracks.
- Potential “black hole” – you must prioritize & triage – a shotgun approach will fail.
- It gets easier with practice.



KEY WEB LINKS:

- ▶ SAM – www.sam.gov
- ▶ NAICS CODES <https://www.census.gov/naics/>
- ▶ [SMALL BUSINESS SIZE STANDARDS](#)
- ▶ FAR - <https://www.acquisition.gov/browse/index/far>



Thanks for your participation!

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