Getting started with an RFP for a software purchase

### Instructions

This template includes multiple sections and subsections that can be used to develop an RFP. It is not necessary to use each section and subsection. Each software buying team should choose the information that is important for them to share and gives IT vendors the information they require to understand what is being requested and the RFP process.

The template includes eight sections with a brief description that may be considered when creating the RFP for a software purchase.

### Section 1: Title page

The title page should include the name of the company submitting the RFP, clear wording that the document is an RFP, the date of issue and a version number. Other data, such as who prepared the RFP, may also be included.

### Section 2: Change log

The change log should be used to highlight changes as the document goes through different phases of development and review.

### Section 3: RFP overview

This section gives vendors a high-level overview of the type of system being considered and an approximate timeline. Consider writing a paragraph or two.

### Section 4: Company overview

Here, the software buying team shares information about the company that vendors can use when building a response to the RFP. Consider including some or all the following information:

* Information about the company, such as company leaders and head office location.
* When the company was founded.
* The type of company, such as private, public or not-for-profit.
* The industry the company operates in.
* Number of employees.
* Number of countries where the company operates and number of employees per location.
* Strategic direction.
* Mission.
* Vision.
* Values.
* Other data that is relevant for the software being purchased. For example, if buying an HR system, outlining information about the employee base may be helpful, such as the breakdown between salaried and hourly employees and if employees are using swipe cards to clock in and out.

### Section 5: Project requirements

This is the most important section of the RFP. Here, the software buying team needs to describe the requirements of the project and may provide an overview of the current state. It may include charts, graphs and refer to a spreadsheet or a system that lists all the detailed requirements or other documents that form the RFP.

If the project is broken down into multiple phases, identify what should be included in each phase. If the phases are driven by a certain need, such as the current software becoming unsupported by a certain date, reference it in this section.

### Section 6: Proposal rules, requirements and templates

This section provides vendors with information they must follow when submitting their RFP and how the process works once the RFP deadline has passed. Consider adding the following subsections.

#### Proposal submission

* Proposal submission date and time.
* How to submit the proposal, i.e., email or website.
* Restrictions related to file size, number of documents or file types.
* Information on what to do if there are issues submitting the document.
* Wording that indicates that the vendor is solely responsible for making sure the submission is received by the company by the deadline.

#### Proposal document

* Maximum number of pages.
* Mandatory sections.
* Document format specifics, such as fonts and page size.
* Mandatory information that must be provided in the response.

#### Clarifications related to the RFP

* The steps IT vendors should take to get clarifying information.
* How information missing from the RFP is communicated to the vendors.
* Deadline for questions to be submitted, including date and time.

#### Legal information

* Confirmation that the RFP does not constitute a contract.
* Wording indicating that the RFP can be changed or canceled at the company's discretion.
* Statement that submissions become the property of the company.
* Insurance requirements of the vendor, such as liability insurance.
* Notice that vendor demonstrations may be required as a next step in the evaluation process.
* Key dates, such as the following:
  + - Date the RFP was issued.
    - Deadline for submitting questions.
    - Date written proposals are due.
    - Vendor demonstrations -- this may be a date range.
    - Preferred vendor identified.
    - Contract finalized.
    - Planned go-live date.

### Section 7: Evaluation process

In this section, the software buying team provides IT vendors with information about how the RFP submissions are evaluated. It can include the makeup of the evaluation committee in terms of number of people and experience, such as indicating that technical, financial and software practitioners are involved.

#### Point breakdown

Here, IT vendors are told how points are allotted by section during the evaluation process. This helps the vendors understand where they should spend most of their time while preparing a response to the RFP. For example, the evaluation process may award 100 points per submission, where 50 points are awarded for the requirements section, 25 points for the fees and price section, and so on.

#### References

A request for references and the role references play in the final selection.

#### Vendor demonstrations

Under which circumstances demonstrations are held from vendors, such as only the top two or three vendors are selected based on the points earned in their RFP response.

#### Final ranking

Gives an overview of how the top vendor is selected, including points earned, vendor demonstration and other considerations.

### Section 8: Contract negotiations

This section indicates the vendor with the highest final ranking is invited to contract negotiations. It can also indicate what happens in the event a contract can't be agreed upon. The software buying team may also want to indicate that the contract is not in effect until both parties have signed a contract.