

How to Evaluate RFP Responses

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Writing your RFP is only half the battle. Now all of your hard work defining your needs and specifications is rewarded with a flood of proposals! Here are some helpful hints in contending with your RFP responses so that your school or district can award your project to the most worthy vendor.

Don't go it alone

Just as you utilized knowledgeable peers and key stakeholders for defining the requirements of your RFP, a dedicated team is essential to evaluating your RFP responses. Using the same team is ideal, or at least those who will be most affected by the decision or those with the most relevant expertise.

Prioritize your priorities

Ask your evaluation team for their specific considerations and create a matrix of evaluation criteria that collects all of these priorities. Each vendor responding will bring something different to the table, whether it is low cost, high quality, fast delivery, accessible customer support or the most complete feature set or solution. Deciding what priorities are the most important to you will serve as a lens by which you evaluate all responses.

Settle on a score

Establish a meaningful scoring method before studying vendor proposals. A scoring method helps you to better compare vendors against your criteria, as well as weight criteria since all considerations may not be equally important. Grouping criteria into sections is helpful in assigning weight. Simply assigning a blanket scoring method, such as a scale of 1–10, gives equal importance to every factor that is rarely the case, in reality. By scoring each question on a different scale, your scoring method becomes more flexible and accurate. Establish what features and requirements should receive the highest priority and use this input to craft a list of scoring criteria.

Rally and tally

After drafting your scoring criteria, gather multiple evaluators to undergo the scoring process. Have all evaluators read through the responses, focusing primarily on their proposed solutions as outlined in the Statement of Work.

Aggregate the scores based on your scoring method. Average the scores of all team members for each vendor's response and pick a winner.

Vendors often must schedule staff and resources to complete your project so be sure to alert all vendors of your decision immediately. Take time to talk with vendors and give each a critique of their proposal.

It's important to keep in mind that an RFP doesn't decide who will ultimately be awarded your project. It merely separates the wheat from the chaff. It's up to your evaluation team to decide whether to go with the lowest bid, the best customer service, or the most comprehensive solution (it is rare that a vendor can confidently assure all three). A winning vendor must be the best fit for your school or district as they may become a longtime partner, helping you to achieve your education technology goals.

How to Respond to a Bid

Bids are typically awarded to vendors with the overall capability to complete the job successfully while conforming to all necessary evaluation criteria and requirements. If multiple bids are deemed acceptable, you have the option to interview the best vendors and discuss issues such as pricing, services, and other portions of the bids.

Questions to ask when assessing a bid

- Does the response meet the needs of your school or district? Does it take into account any possible additional services or expertise offered or the vendor's inability to meet any specified requirements?
- Can the vendor provide services, staffing, and resources for the required period of time? Do they have a history of providing such services to other schools or districts?
- How does cost figure into your decision-making? What warranty information is provided, if any?
- Does the bid indicate typical response time for support help? Does it include any on-site training?
- Does the response reflect a full understanding of the scope of work?
- Does the bid include unfamiliar products or services or cite complex procurements?
- Are there any mistakes included in the bid? If so, your school or district can either waive them or allow the vendor to correct them if this proves advantageous to you.

Lastly, any gratuity or mention of favors with the intent of influencing the decision-making process is both unethical and illegal.

Some basic vendor etiquette

- Be sure that you and your staff are "team players" and accessible.
- Be culpable if there are any project setbacks that are your fault.
- Be timely in paying invoices.