**State of Maine**

**Guidelines for Proposal Evaluations and Consensus Scoring**

The following document provides guidelines for the evaluation process used with State of Maine Requests for Proposals (RFPs). These guidelines are based upon best practices, as determined by the Division of Procurement Services, but they do not necessarily represent State statute, law, or policy. The goals of the evaluation process are to 1) ensure fairness and objectivity in review of the proposals and 2) ensure the contract is awarded to the “best value” bidder whose proposal best satisfies the criteria of the RFP.

**Pre-Evaluation**

* **Evaluation Team Formation:** Simultaneous with the first drafting of the RFP, the members of the Department’s evaluation team should be selected. The members should have some knowledge of the RFP’s subject matter. However, this is an evaluation ***team***, so every member does not need to be knowledgeable in every aspect of the RFP. It is suggested, but not required, that evaluation teams be made up of at least three people (and more than six is probably not necessary).
* **Pass/Fail Items:** Some RFPs may include pass/fail items. These items are not scored and represent requirements bidders must demonstrate to be considered for award. Examples of pass/fail criteria may include: a requirement of a specific designation such as “non-profit”, being located within a specific geographical location, having specific licensure/certification/recognition, etc.
	+ Proposals which fail to meet any of the pass/fail criteria in an RFP are to be **rejected**. Documentation supporting this decision is to be placed on the Bidder’s [**Team Consensus Evaluation Notes**](https://www.maine.gov/dafs/bbm/procurementservices/sites/maine.gov.dafs.bbm.procurementservices/files/inline-files/Team%20Consensus%20Evaluation%20Notes%201-3-2020.docx) form in the “Pass/Fail Criteria” section. Copies of proposals rejected at this stage are **not** distributed to the evaluation team members for evaluation.

**Individual Evaluations**

* **Initial Review:** Prior to receiving proposals, evaluation team members should familiarize themselves with the released RFP and **all** issued amendments & addendums (This includes the “Summary of Questions and Answers”). After proposals have been received, and several days prior to the first meeting of the evaluation team, team members should be given one copy of each proposal to be reviewed. The evaluation members **must** read and review each proposal and take [**Individual Evaluation Notes**](https://www.maine.gov/dafs/bbm/procurementservices/sites/maine.gov.dafs.bbm.procurementservices/files/inline-files/Individual%20Evaluation%20Notes%201-3-2020.docx).
* **Statutory Requirements:** Statute requires **each** evaluator/reviewer to take individual notes, which will assist you in remembering items for the purpose of consensus discussion and for transparency purposes. Be sure to 1) save the notes because they **must** be preserved by the Department, 2) type or write legibly and 3) use only appropriate wording (for example, no slang or unclear abbreviations/acronyms).
* **Notetaking:** Individual notes are to have the RFP number, RFP Title, Bidder’s name, date reviewed and the evaluator’s name at the top of each page. The individual notes should highlight significant points in the proposals (for example, strengths/weaknesses) and note any questions they would like to discuss in the evaluation team meeting(s). The evaluators are **not** to score the proposals in their individual notes, as the scoring is done in the consensus/group setting.
	+ One method of individual note taking that has been successfully utilized is using the P/N/Q/I method. Using this method, evaluators mark their individual comments with one of the four letters. The letters represent:
* **P** (Positive): Indicates what the evaluator sees as a strength.
* **N** (Negative): Indicates what the evaluator sees as a weakness.
* **Q** (Question): Indicates the evaluator is uncertain about the information presented.
* **I** (Interesting): Indicates the evaluator finds the information interesting (i.e. when proposal provides an innovative approach or solution – “outside the box”).

**Team Evaluations**

* **Consensus Approach:** The use of a consensus approach is suggested to evaluate the proposals and assign evaluation points. This means that evaluation team members will **not** assign any scores during their individual reviews of the proposals. Instead, the entire evaluation team will arrive at a consensus as to assignment of points on each evaluation criterion of each proposal during the evaluation team meeting(s). A facilitator may assist the team in developing consensus, but the facilitator should not exercise decision-making in the determination of the assignment of points to proposals. If no facilitator is used, the designated lead evaluator will conduct the meeting but should not unduly influence other evaluators.
* **Order of Review:** There is no preferred order of review of proposals. Evaluation teams may decide to review proposals by alphabetical order, random selection or another appropriate method. It is recommended, however, that the evaluation team review and assign points to only one proposal at a time. This approach works best when proposals are reviewed and scored by proceeding through each of the RFP’s evaluation criteria in numerical order. After completing the review and assigning points to an entire proposal, the team then moves on to the next proposal, and so forth.
* **Measure Proposals against the RFP, not other Proposals:** Proposals **must** be evaluated against the criteria of the RFP. Do **not** evaluate or compare proposals to each other except when evaluating for cost.
* **Only One Score Sheet for each Proposal:** The facilitator or lead evaluator will keep the **only** document for recording the team consensus comments and assigned points for each proposal. The document to be used is the [**Team Consensus Evaluation Notes**](https://www.maine.gov/dafs/bbm/procurementservices/sites/maine.gov.dafs.bbm.procurementservices/files/inline-files/Team%20Consensus%20Evaluation%20Notes%201-3-2020.docx) **form.**
* **Assign Points for each Factor only One Time:** Do **not** assign points for the same factor in more than one evaluation criterion. For example, if the team believes that “quality assurance” should be taken under consideration and evaluated under the “General Specifications” criterion, do not also evaluate “quality assurance” under the “Scope of Work” criterion.
* **Awarding points:** In determining how well a proposal scored, the recommended approach for evaluation teams is to determine how many points for the section being evaluated did the proposal “**earn**”. With this approach, all proposals start off with zero points and are awarded points based on how well they responded to the criteria of the RFP. Evaluation teams can also set a minimum threshold amount, such as awarding half the available points in a particular section to those proposals which only met the minimum requirements. Proposals which exceed the minimum requirements would receive higher scores. This approach not only allows for a clear indication of which proposals met the minimum requirements, it also allows for a natural separation between outstanding, adequate and substandard proposals.
* **Cost Scoring:** Scoring of the cost proposal information should be in accordance with whatever was specified within the RFP. The majority of State of Maine RFPs specify the following:
	+ The lowest price proposal will receive the maximum cost points. If two or more proposals have the exact same lowest price, then they all receive the maximum cost points.
	+ Proposals that don’t have the lowest price will be assigned points based on the following formula:

(Lowest submitted cost proposal / Cost of proposal being scored) x (Total cost points available) = Pro-Rated Score (Recommended to round decimals to the nearest tenth. For example – 19.3)

As an example, if 30 points was the maximum to be awarded for price, and the lowest price proposal is $10,000 and the proposal being scored is $14,000, the $14,000 proposal would receive 21.4 points based on the following calculation:

($10,000/$14,000) x 30 points = 21.4 points

**RFP Process Training Videos:**

* <https://www.maine.gov/dafs/bbm/procurementservices/Policies-Procedures/Training>
	+ Evaluation Phase 1: Individual Notes
	+ Evaluation Phase 2: Team Consensus
	+ Role of the RFP Coordinator