# Request for Proposals Evaluation Guidelines Policy

The purpose of this policy is to assist evaluators in scoring responses to Requests for Proposals (RFPs). Applying these guidelines to the scoring process will ensure that the scoring is consistent and unbiased, which is critical when deciding whether to make an award to a vendor.

## I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to assist evaluators in scoring responses to Requests for Proposals (RFPs). Applying these guidelines to the scoring process will ensure that the scoring is consistent and unbiased, which is critical when deciding whether to make an award to a vendor.

## II. APPLICABILITY

This policy is applicable to all persons who are provided email accounts by the Louisiana Department of Health (“Department”).

## III. EFFECTIVE DATE

The effective date of this policy is January 29, 2019.

## IV. POLICY STATEMENT

The following document provides guidelines for the evaluation process used when evaluating a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the Department. These guidelines are based upon best practices as determined by the Office of State
Procurement. Variations from these guidelines may be allowed when approved by LDH Bureau of Legal Services, if the variations are deemed fair, logical (not arbitrary or capricious) and in accordance with State and federal statutes and rules.

V. RESPONSIBILITIES

LDH employees will follow the evaluation guidelines (Attachment 1) when reviewing and scoring proposals in response to an RFP.

1. The employee named in the RFP as the RFP Coordinator will serve to coordinate the receipt and initial review of all proposals to determine eligibility of a proposer for consideration.

2. The Evaluation Team leader will serve as the coordinator of all evaluation and scoring processes.

3. The Bureau of Legal Services will serve as an advisory to the RFP Coordinator and the Evaluation Team. All change requests, correspondence and communications with regards to the evaluation process shall be reviewed and approved by LDH Bureau of Legal Services. This includes, but is not limited to: the Evaluation tool, a Request for clarification, a Request for subject matter experts (SME), changes to the evaluation guidelines and/or the evaluation tool.

4. LDH Statewide Program Manager (SPM) or designee, will serve as the monitor of the evaluation scoring process. The SPM will make every effort to attend all meetings and to provide guidance and assistance before, during and after the evaluation process.

5. The RFP Coordinator, or the SPM, may request assistance and support from the Office of State Procurement (OSP). OSP may be asked to attend the Evaluation Meetings, pre-proposal conference or on-site presentations and all other matters regarding the RFP process. OSP will serve to guide with the RFP process. (Attachment 2)

6. LDH employees shall adhere to the use of the included forms, (Exhibits A-C within Attachment 1, Evaluation Guidelines).

VI. REFERENCES

Attachment 1: LDH Evaluation Guidelines

EXHIBITS:

   Exhibit A: LDH Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest Statement
   Exhibit B: Certification for Receipt of Electronic Version of Proposals
   Exhibit C: Guidelines for On-site Presentations / Demonstrations

Attachment 2: Memo OSP 19-02 Participation in the RFP process

VII. REVISION HISTORY

<table>
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<th>Date</th>
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<td>January 29, 2019</td>
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The following document provides guidelines for the evaluation process to be used with LDH Requests for Proposals (RFPs). These guidelines are based upon best practices, as determined by the Office of State Procurement, but they do not represent State statute, law or policy. Variations from these guidelines may be allowed when approved by LDH Bureau of Legal Services, if the variations are fair, logical (not arbitrary or capricious) and do not violate State and federal statutes or rules.

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” proposer whose proposal best satisfies the requirements outlined in the RFP.

1) **Evaluation Team Formation and Initial Activities**: 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 the evaluation team(s) be made up of at least three people (and more than six is not recommended, except in the case of very large and complex RFPs). For large and complex RFPs the evaluation team may be composed of subsets teams, each team may be assigned a section of the RFP to review and evaluate. After it is formed, the Evaluation Team should promptly:
   a) Select the Evaluation Team Leader; and
   b) Prepare an evaluation tool to be used to score the proposals. The evaluation tool should be made available for review and approval by the Bureau of Legal Services prior to the date proposals are due. The evaluation tool shall not be modified once the evaluations begin. All proposals must be evaluated in the same manner, utilizing the same process and by the same people.

2) **Preparation for Evaluation Team Meetings**: 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 deemed acceptable after the Administrative Review, the evaluation team members should be provided with a copy of each proposal to be reviewed. All team members should be provided ample time to review prior to the first meeting of the Evaluation Team. The Evaluation Team members must read and review each proposal and take notes if necessary. *(Notes taken become an official record of the RFP)*
   a) If notes are taken 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).
   b) Individual notes are to have the RFP number, RFP Title, Proposer’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.
      i) *One method of individual note taking that has been successfully utilized is using the P/M/Q/I method.* Using this method, evaluators mark their individual comments with one of the four letters. The letters represent the following:
         - **P** (Positive): Indicates what the evaluator sees as a strength;
         - **M** (Minus): Indicates what the evaluator sees as a weakness;
         - **Q** (Question): Indicates what the evaluator is uncertain about in the information presented; and
- I (Interesting): Indicates what the evaluator finds in the information to be interesting (i.e. when proposal provides an innovative approach or solution – “outside the box”).

3) **Evaluation Team Meetings:** The Evaluation Team Leader shall organize the team meetings and give each team member sufficient notice to allow members to make necessary arrangements to attend. The agenda should include the date, time and location of the meeting. All team members shall be present for the entire duration of the evaluation review and scoring process, which may require a single day or multiple days, depending on factors such as the number, length, and complexity of the proposals.

- Once the evaluation review and scoring begin, there will be no changes to the membership of the Evaluation Team. In the event that there is an unavoidable situation that results in the absence of an Evaluation Team Member, the Evaluation Team Leader must consult with the Bureau of Legal Services for guidance.

- The consensus evaluation **shall** require all Evaluation Team Members to be physically present at the evaluation scoring meeting, unless an exemption permitting participation by video conference is granted. Approval by LDH Bureau of Legal Services and the Undersecretary is necessary for any such exemption, which will require that all evaluation team member(s) be located at two or more state-operated facilities within the state while participating. Each facility involved must have access to appropriate technology and be equipped with PC, laptop, television, or overhead screen that will connect properly to the other meeting site facility location(s) and will provide clear and effective audio/visual communication between the team members located at the different sites. The use of personal equipment such as smart phones, tablets, or similar devices is prohibited. All requests for exemption must include site location, audio/visual equipment and connectivity support information. The request must be signed by the appropriate Assistant Secretary or Medicaid Director and be submitted by the RFP Coordinator to the Bureau of Legal Services and Undersecretary for approval. **Consensus evaluation and scoring by telephone conference call is prohibited.**

3) **Confidentiality Statement:** Every member must sign a Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest Statement before receiving a copy of the proposals. (Exhibit A)

4) **Electronic Release Form:** Evaluators shall sign a Certification for Receipt of Electronic Proposals. (Exhibit B)

5) **Subject Matter Expert (SME):** The SME member is a non-scoring member that will provide clarification, subject matter expertise during the evaluation process to support the Evaluation Team in making their determinations. The Evaluation Team may request the SME to provide clarification or understanding of any section of the RFP. The SME will not advise or influence a decision to arrive at a specific score. All members of the evaluation team shall be present when meeting with the SME. The SME shall not have individual meetings with team members. The SME non-scoring member may include the RFP Coordinator, other personnel from within the department, or the Office of State Procurement to support management oversight. An SME who is a non-state employee and is contracted to serve as the SME for the RFP shall advise only as to the contents of the RFP. The SME shall not have access to the proposals. The SME shall provide a response to the questions asked by the Evaluation Team. The Evaluation Team Leader shall document the question and response. A consultant acting as the SME shall have no conflict of interest or personal, financial, or economic interest in the RFP.

**Participants in the evaluation process shall be required to sign Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest Statements (Exhibit A) prior to the start of the evaluation. This practice can be particularly beneficial when the process includes participants external to the Department.**

6) **Evaluation Monitor:** An Evaluation Monitor is an impartial, independent third party who oversees the conduct of the evaluation process and provides an opinion at the conclusion of the evaluation on the extent to which the process was fairly conducted, consistent with the process detailed within the RFP, and in keeping with the Department’s procurement policies and requirements. This individual is typically engaged for high profile, high risk, or complex
procurement requirements or where the Department seeks additional assurance that the evaluation process is conducted appropriately. The monitor may include the RFP Coordinator, a Statewide Program Manager, or a representative from the Office of State Procurement.

7) **Clarification Request:** A request for clarification from a proposer must be in writing and coordinated by the RFP Coordinator. RFP Coordinator must receive approval from Bureau of Legal Services before the request is sent to proposers. Any response to a request for clarification must be reviewed and approved by the Bureau of Legal Services.

8) **Scoring Method: Consensus Scoring Methodology:** A consensus scoring arrived at by the Evaluation Team after consideration and discussion of all information provided by a proposer will represent a more accurate assessment of the submitted proposal than a mathematical averaging of individual evaluator scores.
   a) During consensus scoring sessions, the Evaluation Team Leader directs the team’s attention to each item in the specifications. The Evaluation Team evaluates on a section by section basis across all proposals, comparing the submitted proposal against the specifications in the underlying RFP. For example, Proposal A will be evaluated against 1st evaluation criteria, when complete, evaluation team will move to proposal B and evaluate 1st evaluation criteria, repeat until all proposals have been evaluated against 1st evaluation criteria. Then start the evaluation process again with proposal A and 2nd evaluation criteria and so on. Consensus scoring sessions encourage open discussions and questions among members of the Evaluation Team. Evaluators discuss the relative strengths and weaknesses of a submitted proposal in each area. Open debate about a proposer's statement or response is encouraged to help ensure nothing proposed in response to a requirement is overlooked. The most important factor in assigning a final consensus score to any item is that the score accurately reflects the merits and value of the proposal for that item.
   b) The top highest scoring proposers may be selected for presentations/interviews/site visits. See Guidelines for On-site Presentations/Demonstrations (Exhibit C). After presentations/interviews/site visits, the Evaluation Team meets again to select the highest scoring proposer(s) which will be recommended for contract negotiation to the Office of State Procurement. The Team may adjust the initial scores based on the information gathered in the presentations/interviews/site visits. Any score changes must be initialed by all evaluation team members.
   c) Once the Evaluation Team has arrived at a consensus score for an item in the evaluation tool, the Evaluation Team Leader captures the consensus score along with documentation of the Team's observations of noted strengths and weaknesses of the proposal for that item. Narrative documentation is required for items that either exceed the specification, or do not meet the specification in some manner. The evaluation team members must sign the evaluation tool before it is turned in to the RFP Coordinator.

   **The consensus score sheet and comments are official and become part of the project file.**

9) **Communication:** The Evaluation Team shall not engage in any communication with proposers and/or discuss the proposals with anyone outside of the Evaluation Team until after the RFP process is complete. The process is not complete until the award has been announced and the 14 day protest period has expired without the filing of a protest by any proposer. Contract negotiations may begin after the award announcement has been officially sent out to all proposers. Negotiations shall cease immediately upon receipt of a protest from one or more proposers and commence only after the Office of State Procurement has lifted the stay.

10) **Equipment and Electronic Devices:** The Evaluation Team may have access to equipment and electronic devices for the review of the RFP and Proposals only. During the evaluation review session, the Evaluation Team shall not conduct any professional, or personal business on any electronic device including cellular/smart phones. The Evaluation Team Leader should schedule adequate breaks during the evaluation session.

11) **Technical Evaluations:** The Evaluation Team shall strictly follow the evaluation methodology and criteria published within the RFP.
   a. The Evaluation Team should first review the non-financial items under Determination of Responsibility.
b. Each proposal shall be evaluated on its own merits. Proposals cannot be compared one to another to arrive at results.
c. The Evaluation Team shall review and score according to how well the proposer responded to each of the requirements in the Technical Proposal section.

12) **Financial Statements:** The agency must select a non-member of the Evaluation Team to conduct a thorough review of the proposer’s financial statements. This person must be someone with appropriate qualifications and experience, preferably someone with an accounting background.
   a) The person selected shall receive a copy of each proposer’s financial statements and a copy of the RFP.
   b) The reviewer of the financial statements shall provide a summary report to the evaluation team as to the financial stability of each proposer as it relates to the RFP. The Evaluation Team shall consider the financial summary report when determining strength and weaknesses.
   c) The reviewer shall sign a Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest Statement prior to receiving a copy of the financial statements.
   d) The agency should establish qualification criteria for persons who are eligible to review and evaluate financial statements.
      (i) The Agency should assess the level of in-house expertise available to review for complex projects. An agency may find it appropriate to engage a third party to perform the reviews.
      (ii) When using a third party, an agency remains responsible for the quality and adequacy of the review process, including the qualification standards for reviewers.
      (iii) The Agency should implement a risk-focused approach for determining the depth of the review needed to ensure that evaluations contain sufficient information and analysis to support the agency’s decision.
      (iv) The Agency must procure these services in accordance to LAC Title 34: Part V. Procurement rules.

Prior to the evaluation and scoring of the proposals, each evaluation team member shall sign below.

**By signing below, you are acknowledging your acceptance and adherence to the evaluation guidelines.**

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**EXHIBITS:**
- Exhibit A: LDH Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest Statement
- Exhibit B: Certification for the Receipt of Electronic Version of Proposals
- Exhibit C: Guidelines for On-site Presentations / Demonstrations
LDH CONFIDENTIALITY AND CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

I, ____________________________, having been appointed as an evaluator for this Request for Proposals (RFP), will assist in the review and evaluation of proposals submitted in response to the ____________________________ RFP, and do hereby make the following declarations:

CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT

1. I have been informed of the confidential nature of this evaluation of the proposals and advised of the real or potential sensitivity and financial significance of the evaluation.

2. Being so advised, I agree to maintain in strictest confidentiality, disclosing to no one except as may be subsequently specifically authorized in an official capacity, the contents of any proposal or other documentation or verbal proceedings to which I may become privy.

3. I understand the actions, which may result from non-compliance with these confidentiality requirements, may include: letter of reprimand, temporary suspension from my job without pay, or dismissal from my job.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

1. To the best of my knowledge, information, and belief, NONE of the following persons has any personal, financial, or economic interest in this RFP or in the potential award of a contract issued as a result of this RFP:
   • Myself.
   • Any member of my immediate family.¹
   • Any member of my current household.
   • Any entity in which I or any member(s) of my immediate family or any member(s) of my current household exercises control or holds an ownership interest of twenty-five percent or greater.
   • Any person² or entity in which I or any member(s) of my immediate family or any member(s) of my current household have a substantial economic interest.³

¹ “Immediate family” is hereby defined as your spouse, your children, the spouses of your children, your brothers and their spouses, your sisters and their spouses, your parents, and the parents of your spouse.
² “Person” is hereby defined as an individual or legal entity other than a governmental entity, or an agency thereof.
³ “Substantial economic interest” is hereby defined as an economic interest which is of greater benefit to the public servant or other person than to a general class or group of persons, except:
• Any person or entity who owes anything of economic value to me, or a member of my immediate family, or a member of my current household.
• Any entity in which I, or a member of my immediate family, or a member of my current household hold the position of officer, director, trustee, partner or employee.
• Any person, or entity who is a party to an existing contract with me, with my immediate family member, with my current household member, or with any legal entity in which I exercise control or own an interest of twenty-five percent or greater.

2. I have not been approached or contacted by any potential contractor with a proposal, proposition, or solicitation which could be construed as an offer resulting in personal, financial or economic gain (including offers of employment) which could affect my objectivity in the evaluation of the RFP proposals.

3. Should any of the aforementioned circumstances occur after the signing of these declarations, I shall disqualify myself from further participation while maintaining my pledge of confidentiality.

I have read the above and understand this confidentiality and conflict of interest statement.

I understand that as a state employee, I must comply with the Louisiana Code of Governmental Ethics (La. R.S. 42:1101 et seq.).

I agree to immediately advise my supervisor as soon as I become aware of any potential or actual conflict of interest, any potential or actual breach of confidentiality or with any question(s).

Signature: ________________________________

Print: ________________________________

Date: ________________________________

(a) The interest that the public servant has in his position, office, rank, salary, per diem, or other matter arising solely from his public employment or office.
(b) The interest that an elected official who is elected to a house, body, or authority has in a position or office of such house, body, or authority which is required to be filled by a member of such house, body, or authority by law, legislative rule, or home rule charter.
(c) The interest that a person has as a member of the general public.
CERTIFICATION FOR THE RECEIPT OF ELECTRONIC VERSION OF PROPOSALS

The electronic version of the proposal(s) received by me as a member of the Evaluation Team for the review and scoring of the __________________ Request for Proposals will not be shared with anyone not participating in the scoring of the proposal(s). I will not save a copy of the proposal(s) to a non-state issued computer and will not copy the proposal(s) to any other device such as flash drive or equivalent device.

I, ____________________________, certify that I understand and will adhere to the statement above.

Signature ____________________________ Date ____________
Guidelines for On-site Presentations / Demonstrations

On-site presentations or demonstrations may be conducted with proposers. It is generally recommended that if on-site presentations/demonstrations are desired, that it is limited to those proposers reasonably susceptible of receiving an award. The language in the RFP should state that LDH reserves the right to request on-site presentations from those proposers considered most susceptible to an award. If initial scoring indicates that on-site presentations are not required, then LDH has no commitment to do so.

On-site presentations are to provide clarification and ensure a mutual understanding of the services to be performed. They also offer the proposer a chance to demonstrate their ability to provide the services other than the written proposal. Exchanges must be tightly controlled / constrained. Ambiguities and past performance cannot be discussed.

Changes to written proposals are not allowed. Discussions can be a written list of questions individualized to each proposal, or may be on-site.

On-site presentations/demonstrations should include subject data such as capabilities, plans and approaches, staffing resources, transition plans and sample tasks, and non-cost information.

Discussions shall not disclose any information derived from proposals submitted by competing proposers.

On-site discussions are between the proposer and the Evaluation Team. The Team Leader shall lead the discussions and explain the ground rules – time allotments, rules on communications with committee, etc. Proposer’s “key personnel” should participate in the discussions if possible – not just the executive team of the company, but those personnel who will actually be responsible for the work. The Evaluation Team shall identify the factors that will be discussed during the on-site discussions. Proposers should be given instructions on what is to be presented and told to avoid sales presentations.

If practicable, score immediately after all discussions are completed.

Preparation Instructions for On-site Presentations

When on-site presentations may be used to evaluate and select the contractor, it must be indicated in the RFP’s Schedule of Events.

Instructions for on-site presentations/demonstrations are to be provided to proposers when the on-site presentations/demonstrations are scheduled and should include the following:
• Description of the topics that the proposer must address and the technical and management factors that must be covered;
• Statement concerning the total amount of time that will be available to make the presentation;
• Description of limitations on State-proposer interaction during, and, if possible after, the presentation;
• Statement that the presentation will constitute clarifications only;
• Description and characteristics of the presentation site;
• Rules governing the use of presentation media;
• The anticipated number of State attendees for handouts;
• Description of the format and content of presentation documentation, and their delivery;
• Statement whether the presentation will be recorded (e.g., videotaped or audio tape recorded); and
• Sign in sheet, all present must sign.

Below is sample language sent to proposers regarding a recent on-site presentation:

Information and Agenda regarding On-Site Presentations:

On-site presentations will allow the proposer to demonstrate its capacity to provide the services requested. The RFP Evaluation Team will evaluate the on-site presentations based on demonstration of the following: understanding of project scope; capability to provide services; preparedness to successfully provide the requested services; and also the flexibility to adapt to adjustments as changes take place on both the Federal and State levels.

Below is the recommended structure and time limits for the presentation:

15 minutes
Provide a summary of your organization’s top two or three strengths – and what these strengths will mean specifically to the services to be provided to LDH under this RFP.

10 minutes
Demonstrate your organization’s capability to anticipate changes and also how it can respond and adjust to unexpected changes.

10 minutes
What does your organization consider the 3 most innovative/unique components of its proposal?

10 minutes
Provide a strategic overview of the partnership with LDH that your organization envisions. If possible, but not required, please consider having your proposed Project Manager and other essential key personnel attend the on-site presentation and provide a brief overview of his/her view of the overall project. If the Project Manager is not available to attend, proposers can close with a topic of its own choice.

15 minutes
Questions and general discussion with the Evaluation Team.
LDH is not establishing a limit on the number of attendees for the proposer.

Attending on behalf of LDH will be the RFP Evaluation Team and a representative of the LDH Program office. LDH may also have other LDH personnel or staff from Office of State Procurement in attendance. (Optional: The conference room will have multi-media access, however, please inform the RFP Coordinator if you have any special requirements).
MEMORANDUM OSP 19-02

TO: All Agency Heads, Department Undersecretaries, and Business Managers

FROM: Paula Tregre, Director of State Procurement

DATE: October 3, 2018

RE: Request for Proposal Process

The Office of State Procurement (OSP) is working to streamline the current Request for Proposal (RFP) process for Consulting and Social Services RFPs issued under La. R.S. 39:1595. Beginning October 8, 2018, OSP encourages agencies to include OSP in pre-proposal conferences and RFP evaluation meetings. OSP will attend the meetings solely as an observer.

The purpose of this initiative is to assist OSP in the review and concurrence with the agency’s award recommendations resulting from Consulting and Social Services RFPs. Observing evaluation meetings will allow OSP staff to gain a better understanding of the award documents submitted by agencies. In addition, OSP will provide feedback to the agency in order to promote efficiency and improve management of the RFP process. The goal is to decrease the amount of time required for OSP to concur with agency award recommendations.

Additional information will be available in the next edition of OSP’s newsletter due out 10/08/18. If you have any questions, please contact Austin Bachman at Austin.bachman@la.gov.