

11—117.9(8A) Types of solicitations. The department may use the following solicitation methods when procuring goods and services of general use for the enterprise.

117.9(1) Informal competition.

a. Description of solicitation. The informal request for bids or proposals may be completed electronically, by telephone or fax, or by other means determined by the department.

b. Response and evaluation. Informal bids shall be tabulated, evaluated, documented and attached to the purchase order.

117.9(2) Formal competition.

a. Description of solicitation. A formal request for bids or proposals shall include:

- (1) Bid due date.
- (2) Time of public bid opening.
- (3) Complete description of commodity needed.
- (4) Buyer's name or code.

b. Response and evaluation. Bids submitted shall be sealed until the date and time of opening. All bids received prior to the date and time set forth on the solicitation will be publicly opened and announced at the designated time and place. All responses shall be documented, evaluated, tabulated and available for public inspection.

117.9(3) Request for bids. A request for bids shall be used to select the lowest responsible bidder from which to purchase goods and services of general use on the basis of price. Vendors may offer goods and services that equal or exceed the state's specifications. Bids that do not meet specifications shall be rejected. The state will not give weight to goods and services offered which exceed specifications. When it is feasible to do so and objective data exists to support the state's decision, the award may be made on a life cycle cost basis.

117.9(4) Requests for proposals.

a. Description of solicitation. The department shall issue a request for proposals whenever a requirement exists for a procurement and cost is not the sole evaluation criterion for selection. The request for proposals shall provide information about a requirement for technical equipment or professional services that is sufficient for the vendor to propose a solution to the requirement. Elements of a request for proposals shall include, but need not be limited to:

- (1) Purpose, intent and background of the requirement.
- (2) Key dates in the solicitation process.
- (3) Administrative requirements for submitting a proposal and format for the proposal.
- (4) Scope of work and performance requirements.
- (5) Evaluation criteria and method of proposal evaluation.
- (6) Contractual terms and conditions.
- (7) Need for a vendor conference.

b. Response and evaluation. Proposals submitted shall be sealed until the date and time of opening. All proposals received prior to the date and time of opening will be opened, and the name of the submitting vendor will be announced. The issuing purchasing officer will review proposals for compliance with requirements before the proposals are submitted for evaluation. A request for proposals shall be evaluated according to criteria that are developed prior to the issuance of the request for proposal document and that consist of factors relating to technical capability and the approach for meeting performance requirements; competitiveness and reasonableness of price or cost; and managerial, financial and staffing capability.

117.9(5) Best and final offer option.

a. Description of solicitation. The department reserves the right at its sole discretion to conduct a best and final offer process prior to making an award. The best and final offer process shall be conducted after the receipt of responses to a solicitation and prior to publicly releasing the responses. Any best and final offer process shall not allow material modification of the original solicitation requirements or of the evaluation criteria.

The department shall provide to affected vendors instructions that describe in specific terms how the department intends to arrive at the final order or master agreement. The instructions may include modifying the initial offer, updating pricing based on any changes the agency has made, and any added inducements

that will improve the overall score in accordance with the evaluation. Other types of solicitations described in this rule may be modified to allow for a best and final offer process.

The department may enter into negotiations with the highest ranked vendor or conduct simultaneous negotiations with a number of the most highly ranked vendors whose total scores are relatively close.

b. Response and evaluation. A best and final offer shall arrive by the due date and time determined by the department and shall be sealed. Evaluation of best and final offers shall be conducted in the same manner as original cost proposals. Scores on the best and final offer shall replace the score achieved on the original proposal.

When negotiating with the highest ranked vendor, the department may accept the vendor's best and final offer or reject the offer and open negotiations with the next highest ranked vendor. The department shall proceed in the same manner in rank order. If the state is unable to negotiate an agreement with the highest ranked vendor, the state may negotiate a best and final offer agreement with another vendor. A best and final offer agreement accepted from a subsequent vendor must be more favorable to the state than the rejected offer or offers.

When negotiating with the highest ranked group of vendors, the department shall request the best and final offer from each. The department shall issue a notice of intent to award that is in the best interest of the enterprise.

117.9(6) *Reverse auction.*

a. Description of solicitation. The department may purchase goods and services through a reverse auction, a repetitive competitive bidding process that allows vendors to submit one or more bids, with each bid having a lower cost than the previous bid. Notice to vendors shall be given as described in this chapter. The notice shall include the start and ending time for the reverse auction and the method in which it will be conducted.

b. Response and evaluation. Vendors intending to participate shall provide to the department a notice of their intent to participate and of their agreement to provide goods or services equal to or exceeding specifications. The department may require vendors to prequalify to participate in a reverse auction. Prequalification may include a requirement to commit to a baseline price.

117.9(7) *Invitation to qualify (ITQ).* The department may prequalify vendors and make available to an agency a list of vendors that are capable of providing the requested service.

a. Description of solicitation. The department may prequalify vendors for certain classes of solicitations, including but not limited to:

- (1) Consulting services,
- (2) Architectural services, and
- (3) Engineering services.

b. Notification of ITQ solicitation. Following institution of a prequalification process, the department may select, in a competitive manner, a prequalified vendor without public notice and without further negotiation of general terms and conditions. A solicitation may be restricted only to prequalified vendors, in addition to the TSB notification required by subrule 117.8(2).

c. Not an award. Vendor prequalification is not an award and does not create an obligation on the part of the department.

d. Purpose. The department shall use an invitation to qualify process for the purpose of facilitating a subsequent solicitation that uses one of the other methods described in these rules. The purposes of using an invitation to qualify process include but are not limited to the following:

- (1) Standardize state terms and conditions relating to the type of procurement, thereby avoiding repetition and duplication.
- (2) Ensure that prequalified vendors are capable of performing work in a manner consistent with operational standards developed and adopted by the department.
- (3) Implement a pay-for-performance model directly linking vendor payments to defined results as required by Iowa Code section 8.47.
- (4) Consolidate records of vendor qualifications and performance in one location for reference and review.
- (5) Reduce time required for solicitation of proposals from vendors for individual procurements.

e. Evaluation criteria. The department shall develop criteria for vendor qualification based upon its own expertise, the recommendations of its advisors, information and research, and the needs of agencies. The department shall develop and specify evaluation criteria for each invitation to qualify. Examples of evaluation criteria may include but are not limited to the following:

- (1) Affirmative responses to a mandatory agreement questionnaire.
- (2) Ratings of at least average on a professional/technical personnel questionnaire.
- (3) Scores in a specified range for each client reference survey.
- (4) Competitive cost data by type of service.
- (5) Acceptable vendor financial information.

f. Issuance of open invitation.

(1) The department shall issue invitations to qualify on an as-needed basis.

(2) The department shall specify the period of time that the invitation to qualify will remain open and the time period for applicability.

(3) Vendors may apply for eligibility on a continuous basis during the time period that the invitation to qualify remains open.

g. Response and evaluation.

(1) Vendors seeking to qualify shall be required to meet all the criteria established by the department for a particular category or type of solicitation.

(2) The department shall continuously evaluate vendor applications for placement on a prequalified-vendor list during the period that the invitation to qualify remains open.

h. Acceptable performance levels.

(1) The department shall establish and notify prequalified vendors of minimum acceptable performance levels and institute a performance tracking mechanism on each prequalified vendor.

(2) An approved vendor remains qualified for the period specified by the department unless the vendor does not meet minimum acceptable performance levels.

(3) If a vendor's performance falls below the minimum acceptable level, the vendor shall be removed from the prequalified list.

(4) A vendor that does not prequalify or that is removed from the prequalified list due to the vendor's performance has the right to appeal in accordance with rule 11—117.20(8A).

117.9(8) *Other types of solicitations.* The department may use other types of competitive solicitations not outlined in these rules if the following conditions are met:

a. The solicitation method has been clearly described in public notice.

b. The solicitation method includes fair and objective criteria for determining the award.

117.9(9) *Request for information (RFI).* A request for information (RFI) is a nonbinding method an agency may use to obtain market information from interested parties for a possible upcoming solicitation. Information may include, but is not limited to, best practices, industry standards, technology issues, and qualifications and capabilities of potential suppliers. Agencies considering the use of an RFI shall contact the department for information and guidance in using this process.

[ARC 0952C, IAB 8/21/13, effective 9/25/13; ARC 2036C, IAB 6/10/15, effective 7/15/15; ARC 9355C, IAB 6/11/25, effective 7/16/25]