

C.2. Request for Proposals and Contracting IS&T Service Providers

Use of suitable implementation processes and practices in the procurement of technology can result in significant better procurement routines and cost savings. Because of the fast changes in IS&T and the changing environment of the health sector, now more than ever, healthcare institutions must have timely and accurate information and comparative performance analysis concerning the best available products and services. An integral part of the procurement process is the *Request for Proposal* (RFP). The benefits of an effective RFP go far beyond cost savings. If done correctly, an RFP can help anticipate needs and resource requirements.

A Request for Proposals details to potential service providers the needs and requirements of a healthcare institution's information systems plan and priorities. It provides guidelines by which the organization can measure a vendor's ability to provide the required product and service. An effective RFP articulates the possible answers and solutions to the real problems and lays the foundation for assessing vendor capabilities. It is a tool to aid the institution in the selection of a provider for the purchase of equipment and products and for the delivery of services.

It is advisable for those institutions without a standard RFP format to review formats of RFPs of similar healthcare institutions to compare areas of concern. Vendors usually respond only to questions asked, and some healthcare institutions may not be aware of other concerns until they face an unforeseen expense or problem. Ideally, RFPs should include as great a degree of specification as possible and should only be prepared once the institution has clearly defined:

- The objectives of the implementation and the tasks the vendor is expected to perform or provide
- Short- and long-term plans for itself
- Which vendors may be the best candidates to perform the needed initiatives and therefore those that should be invited to submit a proposal.

Some institutions may not be fully prepared to issue an RFP, but instead a *Request for Information* (RFI). An RFI is a simple request for information regarding the vendor itself, its experience, products, financial stability, and projects, whereas an RFP requires detailed information regarding the requirements of the institution.