

How to Draft a Request for Proposal (RFP)

To be sure that the technology you bring into your organization fulfills your requirements, it is important to do your homework and draft a Request for Proposal (RFP). An RFP represents a formalized process for documenting, justifying, and authorizing a purchase. The RFP is an accepted tool to use to purchase technology and/or services.

In this toolkit, we will provide the guidelines for developing RFPs. We will provide the step-by-step procedures for analyzing system requirements, developing functional specifications, and evaluating alternatives. This toolkit builds on the “[How to Implement ECM Toolkit](#)” to this toolkit] in which you have established a project team, determined a scope for your project, and established a project budget and schedule.

Step 1: Identify who will receive the RFP

Identify the individuals/vendors who will be sent a copy of the RFP in the hope of receiving a proposal. To identify the RFP recipients, you will need to do some investigation of the industry. The best way to do this is to create a list of potential vendors and then qualify the vendors in order to develop a shortlist. The vendors that make it onto your short list will be sent the RFP.

AIIM Tip

You will want to identify the potential providers of the technology. Stay current on the technology by reading the blogs and discussions on the AIIM Community and attending Chapter events.

For more information:

- [AIIM Buyer's Guide](#)
- [RFP Template](#)
- [Those Darn RFPs %\\$&!!!](#)
- [7 Rules to Write an Effective RFP for Selecting the Right WEM Vendor](#)
- [RFPs are Dead! Here's Why We Should Let Them Rot](#)
- [How to Select an ECM Vendor in 9 Steps](#)
- [The Successful Vendor Selection Process](#)
- [Choosing a Vendor: Six Steps to Find the Best Supplier](#)

Step 2: Draft a Statement of the Problem

At this point, you need to provide a statement of the problem that you are trying to resolve with the implementation of the resulting technology and/or services. Begin by describing the current situation. Be as specific, clear and concise as possible. Provide a description of the current information architecture including the hardware and software already implemented.

Include a description of your company/organization and the work it performs and background information about your industry. Be sure to include information about any current trends or pertinent regulations that the potential RFP responder should consider in their proposal.

Within the RFP, include a list of the goals that the project team is trying to accomplish with the implemented solution. You should also describe the project and the issues you are facing that prompted the needed technology. Include where the technology will be implemented - at the workgroup, division, or enterprise level or at a specific geographic location.

AIIM Tip

The RFP should not identify the solution you are looking to implement. Make sure the project scope and objectives are well defined and clear. This will help to keep scope creep to a minimum. Understand that scope creep will happen regardless of how well defined your scope and objectives are.

For more information

- [Times Have Changed - Problems Remain](#)
- [How to Write a Problem Statement](#)
- [How to Write a Statement Problem](#)
- [Tips on Writing a Problem Statement](#)
- [How to Write a Statement of the Problem in Four Steps](#)

Step 3: Draft the Requirements

There are different types of requirements that must be documented in the RFP - business, technical, and software/vendor experience. Draft your requirements to be exact and as specific as possible. Try not to combine requirements for two solutions. Think about the problem you are trying to solve and phrase your requirements so that the vendors will understand your goals. It is through these requirements that the

vendors will let you know how their technology works, what services they provide, and how their solution will fit your needs.

This is a good time to identify the future state you desire for your organization. The future state should be a narrative of how you view the organization working once your problem has been resolved. Define how the information is received and categorized in your organization and how it is distributed. Describe the current information architecture of your organization so the vendors will know what they will be working with.

AIIM Tip

You should make sure that you correctly define the number of users. Make sure the requirements are functional requirements, and do not specify the technical and/or service solution.

For more information

- [Don't Forget the Hardware in Your RFP](#)
- [4 Consistent Reasons for RFP Frustrations](#)
- [Sometimes Less Is More](#)
- [How to Write Software Requirements Specification](#)
- [Writing Good Requirement](#)

Step 4: Identify the Evaluation Criteria

Your RFP should include a section describing the criteria you will use to evaluate the responses to the RFP. You may want to use a point system where each requirement is assigned a specific point value. You may also add a weighting factor to some sections and/or requirements to further designate their importance. As you evaluate the proposals, you can assign full or partial points depending on how well you feel they fulfill your requirements. Make sure you communicate in the RFP to the potential vendors the method you will be using to evaluate their proposals.

Be sure to include the date the RFP response is to be returned to you. It is also a good idea to identify the format the responses should be in when you receive them.

AIIM Tip

As you are identifying the evaluation criteria, make sure you are clear as to how you want the pricing to be presented in the proposal. Ensure that you have a section in the RFP that specifies the format in which you desire the resulting proposal to be

submitted. Request references from the vendors for when you begin the evaluation process.

For more information

- [Evaluating Enterprise 2.0 Solutions with a Usability Scorecard](#)
- [How to Develop Evaluation Criteria](#)
- [Good Evaluation Criteria](#)
- [Evaluation Criteria](#)

Step 5: Evaluate the Proposals

Evaluating proposals can be a difficult task. It is important to make sure the evaluation is objective. After you have conducted an objective evaluation of the way the vendor proposes to address the requirements listed in the proposal, you can consider some subjective evaluation and take into consideration the proposer's professionalism, commitment to the technology, and other such criteria.

As you review the technical requirements, it should be clear if the vendor meets the requirements fully, partially, or not at all.

Make sure you contact the references given and validate the information the vendor has provided in the proposal. Find out how the project progressed when the vendor implemented the proposed technology and/or services at the references' organizations.

AIIM Tip

The goal of evaluating the proposals is to develop a shortlist of suppliers that you will want to meet with for oral presentations and demonstrations. Also, do your due diligence and review the financial stability of the vendor organization.

For more information

- [Proposal Evaluation and Vendor Selection](#)
- [How to Evaluate RFP Responses](#)
- [Evaluating Vendor Proposals: There's a Better Way](#)
- [Become a Better Technology Shopper](#)
- [RFP Scoring Guidelines](#)

Step 6: Selection and Close the Process

Once you have made your selection based on the requirements analysis, notify the company that will be awarded the work. It is also a good practice to inform all the vendors who submitted a proposal of the status of the search and to let the vendors know why they were not selected.

AIIM Tip

Make sure that you keep as much to the schedule that you provided in the RFP as possible. Let the proposing companies know what your organization will do with their proposal now that a selection has been made. For example, the winning proposal may be kept for X years and shared with others in the organization, but not outside the project team; and those proposals not selected may be maintained for X years or discarded immediately.

For more information

- [Successful RFP Responses](#)
- [How to Tell a Vendor They Were Not Selected](#)
- [Notification of Unsuccessful Bidders](#)
- [Bid Acceptance Letter](#)
- [Enterprise Content Management \(ECM\) Training](#)