

How to Respond to an RFI

When the Government is considering a procurement, but is not sure about specifications or methodologies, they often issue a Request for Information (RFI). An RFI provides you with an opportunity to make suggestions regarding what they should include in the future RFP if it goes forward. It also gives you an opportunity to show the customer that you are qualified, responsive, and helpful.

Sometimes, responding to an RFI is required if you want to be able to respond to the future RFP. When this is the case, it will say so in the text of the announcement.

When responding to an RFI, there are several things that you can try to influence, in order to give you a competitive advantage should an RFP be released in the future. These include influencing the:

- **Technical scope.** Try to include requirements that will limit the field of competitors.
- **Specifications.** Make recommendations that you can comply with, but will be difficult for others.
- **Contract Type.** If you have a preference, here is your chance to make a recommendation.
- **Contract Vehicle.** If you have a contract vehicle that you think is advantageous, recommend its use. Provide sufficient detail (POCs, procedures, contract numbers, etc.) so that they can implement your recommendation.
- **Small Business.** If you are a small business and think you can do the work yourself, recommend that it be released as a small business set-aside (or small disadvantaged business, if you qualify). If you are not a small business, you may want to point out any aspects of what they need that would be difficult for a small business to provide. Then state your willingness to team with a small business if required.
- **Pricing.** With many programs, choices made early on can have a big impact on the price. Here is your chance to influence those choices.
- **Past Performance.** If you don't have any Government project past performance, make sure you recommend that they consider relevant commercial experience.

- **Certifications.** If you have any relevant certifications, recommend that they become requirements to limit the competitive field. If you don't have relevant certifications, recommend that they not be required because they would limit the amount of competition, really are not relevant, would increase the price, etc.
- **Methodologies.** If there is a particular approach you would take, describe it so that they can make it a requirement.

Make sure that you describe your recommendations in language that can be included in the RFP. Keep in mind that if you make a recommendation and it ends up in the RFP, everyone will see it and bid accordingly. Sometimes this will level the playing field and you will lose the competitive advantage. These recommendations are better to save for when you are responding to the RFP, so that you can keep the advantage and stand out from the crowd.

There are other documents that are similar in nature to an "RFI" that they sometimes request. Two of these include:

- Sources Sought Notice. Usually used when they know what they want, but not who can provide it.
- Market Survey. Used to find out about a market and its suppliers.

If you have questions about what they are trying to do, you should call the contracting officer. In fact, you should look for an excuse to call, if only to make contact and boost name recognition. Because it is not (yet) a procurement, you may find them willing to talk and to discuss options, trade-offs, intentions, and other critically important concerns that they will not be willing to discuss once an RFP is released.

RFIs are often announced on Fedbizopps (<http://www.fedbizopps.gov>). You can do searches for the following words to find them:

- "RFI"
- "Request for Information"
- "Sources Sought"
- "Market Survey"
- "Pre-Solicitation Notice"

Responding to RFIs is an excellent way to identify new business opportunities, find a point-of-contact, and establish a relationship with the customer before the RFP hits the street. Often, it can be many months from the release of an RFI to the release of an RFP, and not all RFIs will result in an RFP release.