

State Procurement Office
Workshop No. 205
Planning, Using Requests for Information (RFI)
and Collaboration for Health & Human Services
Pursuant to HRS Chapter 103F

Slide 1: Title Page, Planning, Using Requests for Information (RFI) and Collaboration for Health & Human Services (Title Page)

Thank you for attending Workshop No. 205, Planning, Using Requests for Information and Collaboration for Health and Human Services Pursuant to HRS Chapter 103F.

Slide 2: Starting the Procurement Process

The procurement process starts with planning. In most anything that you do, planning is always a part of the process. And planning takes time.

Slide 3: Why Do We Need to Plan

Planning is covered under Hawaii Administrative Rules Chapter 3-142. So why do we need to plan?

In planning you need to determine what services your agency wants to procure. You also must be able to have the services and requirements clearly conveyed in the RFP because if you don't know what you need, then you can't expect the provider to read between the lines and know or respond appropriately.

Also in planning, procurement and contract timelines need to be established. You might also need to collaborate with providers or the community for such needs as what services are available in the community, where the potential needs are, or what the costs for the types of services you are thinking of procuring.

Planning includes, but is not limited to:

1. Determining service goals and outcomes
2. Determining what services to purchase based on the needs
3. Establishing clear service specifications and provider requirements
4. Establishing proposal evaluation criteria
5. Establishing procurement schedules
6. Collaborating with stakeholders to establish service related parameters

Slide 4: Teamwork

As part of planning, a purchasing agency needs time to plan and develop the RFP. Figuratively speaking, RFPs should not be slapped together overnight. Your agency's service goals and expected outcomes needs to be clear. Criteria needs to be established for evaluating proposals, while always being mindful of statutes, rules, your agency responsibilities. You need to award and contract based on the RFP and the established criteria, all the while being fair, open and transparent. What it all boils down to is having the knowledge and applying it throughout the procurement process. And from beginning to the end, it takes TEAMWORK. It's not just the work of one individual, but many working together to have a successful procurement. Include team members so they understand the goals and mission of the project and how procurement is an important part of the process.

Slide 5: Planning: Identify the Team

Working as a team is instrumental to putting together a clear request for proposal (RFP) resulting in less problems evaluating, awarding and administering the contract.

Now who should be part of your team?

- The RFP coordinator who is part of the procurement process from the planning stage to contract execution.
- The program manager should have input about the service and provider requirements. They should also be familiar with the services because they will be the ones to implement the services.
- Then there are the proposal evaluators and fiscal staff.
- The contract administrator and the program evaluator are the overseers of the contract. They should have input and know what the resulting contract will entail.

Assembling and building the team is a vital part of the planning process.

Slide 6: Planning and Timelines

In your service planning, procurement timelines need to be established. And a way to do it is to work backwards.

Think:

- When do you want the services to begin? And from this date, work your way backwards.
- How much time do you need to execute a contract? Does the provider need start-up time before the services commence. (This may be especially true if the awarded provider is not the current provider.) Is your provider located in the State or on the mainland? Also, how long does it take for the Attorney General's office and your department to review and execute the contract?
- How much time does your proposal evaluation committee need to review the proposals. (And this will depend on the complexity of the service and the number of proposals submitted.)
- Is there a possibility that a protest will be submitted?
- How much time does the provider need to prepare a proposal? If the service is new, greatly modified, or very complex, then you need to allow more time.
- In the planning stage, a request for information (RFI) is required to be issued. Will you need to issue more than 1 RFI?
- Then there needs to be time to develop the RFP.

Project the timeline and plan ahead. Don't wait till the last minute and try to rush through the process. Confucius said, "A man who does not think and plan long ahead will find trouble right at his door."

Slide 7: Some Planning Activities

At least one RFI is required to be conducted in the development of the RFP.

So what are some planning activities?

- You can collaborate with other state agencies, provider and stakeholders to see what is available in the marketplace and the type of services to procure.
- You might want to do a needs assessment or gather data or service information.
- You might also want to review your current contracts and service evaluation reports.

RFIs are used to:

- 1) Obtain results to attaining goals in accordance with statutes, funder's conditions, or community planning processes

- 2) Share planning information and analysis that would result in improved service specifications for purchased services
- 3) Progress toward desired outcomes

Slide 8: Requests for Information (Title Page)

Now let's talk about requests for information

Slide 9: What is a Request for Information (RFI)?

What is a request for information (RFI)?

It is a useful tool to obtain community input & facilitate community planning activities. It's a tool to gather and share ideas and information to find the best way to configure the services you are procuring. When you issue a RFI you determine how you want responses to be submitted, including but not limited to writing, a meeting, by email, or by other electronic means. This all becomes a part of the procurement file, so if you are conducting a meeting, it's always a good idea to have the provider's provide a written response also.

The RFI can be done at any time prior to issuing the RFP.

Slide 10: Examples of Subjects for RFIs

Here are some examples RFIs. A RFI can be conducted to determine how to configure services or to determine the feasibility of the services. It might be for determining if you need more than one service or what areas need the most services. You could issue a RFI to determine what is the most cost effective way to pay for the services, whether it be by cost reimbursement, unit rates or guaranteed payments. You might want to determine which target population to service. Or you could issue a RFI to determine the provider requirements. RFIs can also be used to request expressions of interest to provide a service.

RFIs are specific to your service, so if you're not sure or you need assurance on an aspect of a service, the RFI might be a way for you to get input to resolving the matter. There is no set format or template for you to use. It varies with the types of services and information sought.

Slide 11: Conducting and RFI: Guiding Principles

When you conduct a RFI, you need to be open. There are two kinds of open. It should be open to everyone, to all who may be interested. And you should be open to new ideas and other points of view. You need to be fair when conducting a RFI. The RFI is not to exclude or give unfair advantage and shall be part of the procurement process no matter the method of receiving feedback.

You should always allow a written response, even if you are holding a meeting. For instance, if it is a statewide service and you are conducting an RFI meeting on Oahu, it's always a good idea to allow providers to submit a response in writing, especially if they cannot attend the meeting.

Slide 12: RFIs for Health & Human Services, Requirements Pursuant to HAR §3-142-202

In accordance with HAR Section 3-142-202, the RFI must be conducted whenever developing/preparing to issue a RFP. "...At a minimum, a purchasing agency shall prepare a request for information prior to the development of a request for proposals to obtain community input, and facilitate community planning activities..." You can issue more than one RFI, especially if it is a new or complex procurement, but you must conduct a least one.

Slide 13: RFI Requirements (continued)

The other requirement is that the RFI be posted onto the internet for a minimum of seven days. For the executive branch and participating jurisdictions, the procurement notice are posted on the Procurement Notices System website, (PNS). If you are issuing a RFP that is the same as the one that is expiring, you still need to conduct at least one RFI.

Note that when you issue the RFI it needs to be in writing, but the responses can be received in various ways.

Slide 14: The RFI Timeline

The timeline for the RFI varies depending on what the purchasing agency is seeking. If you are considering a new service and want to see if the service is feasible, you might want to do a RFI early on in the planning stage. Then you might do more RFIs as the planning progresses. If it is an established service, one that you have solicited before, you might want to see if the service specifications are still ok, then you could issue the RFI a little later in the process. But, it's always a good idea not to wait till the last minute and rush to get the procurement done and the contract awarded. You never know when you'll have roadblocks that hinder getting a contract executed on a timely basis.

Slide 15: The RFI Timeline (continued)

When you have significant changes to the services, it's always a good idea to conduct a RFI early on in the procurement process to give the providers advance notice of the changes. Also allow the providers an opportunity to ask clarifying questions regarding your RFI because it might just help making your procurement a little clearer.

The RFI allows providers to plan for services more effectively and it benefits the clients as well. The recommended time to conduct a RFI is 2 to 9 months depending if it's a new or repetitive procurement and also the complexity of the services.

Try not to issue your RFI 2 weeks before the public notice for the RFP. It gives the appearance of insincerity. Courtesy dictates that you provide feedback received in response to the RFI.

Slide 16: The RFI Notice

What do you need to include in the RFI notice?

- The name of the purchasing agency,
- Description of the information that you are seeking,
- What needs to be included in the response, and
- If applicable, other means by which the responses can be submitted such as a presentation, meeting, telephone survey, electronic media, or any combination of these methods.

Slide 17: The RFI Notice (continued)

There are two statements that you are required to include in the RFI notice.

1. Participation is optional, and is not required to respond to an subsequent procurement action a purchasing agency may take.
2. Neither the purchasing agency nor the interested party responding has any obligation under the RFI.

Slide 18: The RFI Notice (continued)

So, how much time do we need to allow for responses?

The RFI notice is required to be posted for a minimum of 7 days. If it is at all possible, allow for more response time.

Be fair. Providers are busy people too.

Slide 19: Conducting a RFI Meeting

If you conduct a RFI meeting, go to the meeting prepared. Have at least one other team member present. Sometimes two pairs of ears are better than one. Also it's hard for one person to conduct, take notes, and keep track of all that goes on in the meeting.

Have an agenda. A sample agenda is available on the SPO website. From the SPO home page, search keyword "Sample RFI."

At the meeting, introduce yourself and other members of your team who are present. Describe the service and its purpose. Describe the purchasing agency mandates and what information you are seeking from the RFI. Have some specific questions in mind. Don't be afraid to answer questions. At the same time, don't answer when you do not have the authority and don't answer when you don't know the answer. Have someone from your office take notes.

Don't try to be all things to all people. If you don't have the answer, say so. "That's a really good question. We hadn't thought of that. We will have to research it and get back to you."

Thank them for coming at the beginning and again at the end. Tell them what will happen next in the procurement process. Let them know you will summarize the results of the RFI.

Slide 20: The RFI Meeting: Request for Written Responses

You know how sometimes after a meeting you think, "Oh I should have said this." Well those who attend the RFI meeting may have the same feeling. So with that in mind, you should allow for written responses to be submitted after the meeting

- Great ideas sometimes occur after-the-fact.
- It also gives those who could not attend an opportunity to respond.

Slide 21: Summarizing the RFI Results

When you summarize the RFI results, it does not mean that you need to write down and respond to each individual question. You can group similar questions and similar responses together.

Summarize how many attended the meeting and/or how many responses you received.

Summarize the issues and summarize your purchasing agency's response.

Slide 22: Summarizing the RFI Results: Who Responded (continued)

This is an example of a RFI summary on who responded:

"Approximately 35 individuals from 27 organizations attended the RFI general meeting held on March 8, 2008. Over 35 written responses were received. Most of the responses were from providers of services to youth and the majority of those were nonprofit providers on Oahu. Several responses were from parents and one was from an interested community member..."

Slide 23: Summarizing the RFI Results: The Issues (continued)

Here is an example of the issues summary:

“Unit Rate: There were several comments about the unit rate. Most related to being paid the same unit rate for high intensity clients as low intensity clients and how this may lead to “creaming.” There was one suggestion that pricing be a fixed price for an entire program and that only one contract awarded statewide. There was also a suggestion about utilizing capitated rates.

Service Configuration: There was one suggestion that services be configured for one provider to provide the services statewide. There were several other comments in this area reflecting that awarding to only one provider was unnecessary, would severely limit competition and was neither advisable nor feasible.”

Slide 24: Summarizing the RFI Results: Response to the Feedback

Here is an example of the purchasing agency’s response to the feedback:

In response to the unit rate issue. “It is unlikely there will be more than a slight increase in the total funds available for this service. ABCE will work to establish a graded unit rate for high and low intensity clients. ABCD has no experience with capitated rates for this type of service and would appreciate assistance from any providers/clients or interested community members who have knowledge of using capitated rates with this type of service.”

Slide 25: Summarizing the RFI Results: Response to the Feedback (continued)

And here’s an example of the purchasing agency’s response to feedback concerning the service configuration issue:

“The biggest concern was the possibility of soliciting for one statewide contract. Several providers indicated it was not feasible in this field. ABCD will continue to contract by geographic by island with the exception that separate proposals will be accepted for East and West Hawaii...”

Slide 26: Using the RFIs for Federal Grant Applications (Title Page)

Okay, let’s move on to RFIs for federal grant applications.

Slide 27: RFI for Federal Grant Applications Pursuant to HAR §3-143-614

RFIs for federal grant applications are covered under HAR Section 3-143-614. This expedited process is covered under the Competitive Method of Procurement. Receipt of federal funds does not automatically exempt a purchasing agency from procurement. The RFI procedure cannot be used when applying for block grants. A purchasing agency may use the RFI process when 1) applying for a federal grant; 2) the grant application requires a description of how the funds will be spent; and 3) it is necessary or will increase the likelihood that the state agency will be awarded by naming the provider(s) in the grant application.

Slide 28: RFI for Federal Grant Application (continued)

When the purchasing agency is conducting a RFI for the purposes of a grant application, a procurement notice shall be posted on the internet for a minimum of 7 days. And when the provider(s) selection is made, the names of all who responded and the justification for the provider selection shall be part of the procurement file.

Slide 29: RFI for Federal Grant Application (continued)

When you are conducting a RFI when applying for a federal grant the following are required in the RFI:

- 1) The name of the state agency issuing the RFI;
- 2) A statement that the request is issued for the purpose of including a provider (or providers) in a federal grant application and that if awarded, may result in a contract with the provider(s);
- 3) Service description;
- 4) Criteria by which the provider(s) will be selected;
- 5) The deadline for submission of responses; and
- 6) Contact information for questions.

Slide 30: RFI for Federal Grant Application (continued)

Other things which you may want to consider when conducting an RFI for a federal grant application:

- Request the responses to be in writing, even if you hold a meeting. It's always better if you have written documentation in your procurement files.
- When you describe the services in the RFI and provide federal references, be sure that the website address provided links directly to a specific site rather than to a generalized federal address. Make it easy for the providers to find the necessary information.

Slide 31: Utilizing the RFI – Summary

So, in summary, the RFI can be used for a variety of purposes, however, it's a requirement when preparing a RFP for health and human services. RFIs can be used for federal grant applications, but only in certain circumstances. A procurement notice for the RFI is required to be posted on the Procurement Notices System website for a minimum of 7 days. You want to allow as much time as possible for providers to have an opportunity to prepare their response. There is no set template for RFIs. However, one place that you can look for examples is on the Procurement Notices website. Also, when preparing for an RFP, providing the results of a RFI and its responses can be extremely helpful to providers.

Slide 32: Want to Post Your RFI on HlePRO (Hawaii e-Procurement)

If your agency would like to conduct the RFI on the Hawaii eProcurement system (HlePRO) then attendance at HlePRO training workshops is mandatory. Also, you will need to be sure that your providers are registered on HlePRO.

Slide 33: Collaboration (Title Page)

Now let's move on to collaboration. Collaboration is a good thing.

Slide 34: Collaboration

Collaboration in procurement means working together, especially in a joint intellectual effort.

Slide 35: Collaboration (continued)

Uncompensated provider participation/collaboration is encouraged. When planning the services being procured, it's always a good idea to collaborate with others, i.e., providers, other state agencies, stakeholders, etc. It's working together for the good of the community.

Slide 36: Collusion

The opposite of collaboration is collusion. Collusion is not okay. Collaboration is the good, collusion is the bad. There is a big difference and you should not be confused by the two. Collaboration is working together openly, towards a good cause, and not meant to be deceitful. Collusion is done illegally, secretly, in a manner to cheat the system, and treachery and fraud are involved.

Slide 37: Areas for Collaboration

These are the some areas which a purchasing agency can collaborate:

You can:

- Share information on community needs
- Determine best practices
- Check available resources within the community
- Figure budgets or cost factors
- Configure services
- Get feedback on service specifications and requirements

Slide 38: Data Sources to Help with Planning

During the planning stage of your service procurement, there are several resources that you can refer to.

On the SPO website you can look at:

- The contract awards for health and human services. The awards/contracts database provides information on the service, department, division, provider, contract period, funding, geographic area, population served and point-of-contact information.
- Next there is the RFP website. Current RFPs as well as closed archived RFPs dating back to 2004 are available at this site. This is a good place to see if another agency has issued a RFP similar to the services you are procuring. Why reinvent the wheel when you can revise what's already in existence and make it your own.
- You can also check the Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism website. There is economic data and trends, census data, and the Hawaii Databook are available to you as a resource.
- Last, but not least, there is the web. With the internet we have access to a wealth of information. When we plan, we want to do so with some data in hand. Information can be found on other state sites, or procurement association sites, i.e., National Institute for Government Procurement (NIGP) or The National Association of State Procurement Officials (NASPO). You can also do a search for the service procurements you are doing. You'll be amazed at what is available!

Slide 39: (Excerpt)

Planning and working together are an all important part of the procurement process. Henry Ford says it best, "Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success."

Slide 40: Planning Note

E'yen A. Gardner said, " Success comes from preparation." So take the time to plan your service procurements. The clearer you can convey your service requirements, the better your chances of executing a timely contract.

Slide 41: Thanks for Attending

And that brings us to the end of this workshop. But before you leave, a self-certification attendance form will pop up on your screen. Please complete and click on the submit button. Soon after there will be a link for a short survey which we would like you to complete. We appreciate your feedback. If you have any questions regarding what was covered in this session, please contact our office. Thank you for your attention

The SPO website: <http://spo.hawaii.gov>

Manual for State & County Personnel > Procurement > Solicitation > Health & Human Services

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