

BEFORE YOU BUY GUIDANCE



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Vendor selection and evaluation is a process that can take some time and energy depending on the product or service but is well worth the effort when the vendor chosen is competitively priced and responsive to the needs of the University.

BEFORE ENGAGING WITH A NEW SUPPLIER

1. Know what you want

Have a clear and accurate description of the technical requirements for the material, product, or service to be procured. Avoid unnecessary or duplicate items or investigate lease vs. buy options.

2. Check internally

Before looking externally for a vendor check the [Strategic Procurement website](#) or contact the Sourcing Team at sourcing_procurement@harvard.edu to see if a Harvard Preferred Vendor or Contract Vendor is available.

3. Research potential new vendors

If a Harvard Preferred Vendor or Contract Vendor is not available there are a number of other resources to consider:

- Consult the internet, trade publications, directories, vendor catalogues and professional journals
- Talk to internal colleagues and peers in other institutions who might have purchased a similar product or service
- Contact industry analysts or market research firms (e.g. Gartner, Forrester, IDC)

4. Determine if an RFx is required

Once a list of potential vendors has been identified begin evaluating each vendor's capabilities and determine if an RFx is appropriate (*see following 'RFI vs RFQ vs RFP' section for information on RFx types*).

There are a number of considerations for vendor selection:

- Evaluate a vendor's financial stability (annual reports, 10K statements, D&B, etc.)
- Find out how long the vendor has been in business
- Find out who are the vendor's primary customers and ask for and check references
- Tour the vendor's facilities, if appropriate
- Does the vendor use state-of-the art technology?
- Is the vendor really interested in doing business with the University?
- Does the vendor use sustainable products and process to conserve natural resources and protect the environment and are energy efficient?

For more information visit the [Strategic Procurement website](#) or contact sourcing_procurement@harvard.edu.

RFI vs RFQ vs RFP

Request for Information (RFI) - may be issued to single or multiple suppliers

What is it used for? It is a request for a prospective supplier to provide Harvard with general information about their products, services, capabilities, approach and general pricing.

What is involved? Since an RFI does not contain Harvard's detailed requirements and does not ask the supplier for a Harvard-specific proposal, it accelerates decision points (e.g. vendor qualification and bid inclusion) while keeping supplier evaluation costs low for both Harvard and suppliers.

An RFI is often used in the early stages of a procurement process to identify qualified suppliers for inclusion in a formal bid.

Request for Quote (RFQ) - may be issued to single or multiple suppliers

What is it used for? It is usually employed for procurement of categories where price and availability are the key considerations. Quotes are particularly useful for predictable projects when the contracting party has a clear understanding of the requirements and processes necessary to achieve the end-product.

What is involved? An RFQ involves providing detailed written specifications including all the terms and conditions for the work, explicitly outlining what the specifications and desired end-product will be. It requires Harvard to provide concrete requirements in terms of a formal list of work, supplies, and equipment required for a project. Suppliers provide specific, committed costs. It may be used to make an award decision.

An RFQ is often issued to suppliers where securing multiple bids is a formal requirement, or when the contracting party is confident the vendors providing the quotes can equally provide the same/or similar quality product/service ("all things being equal"). Typically used for the procurement of goods vs. services.

Request for Proposal (RFP) - may be issued to single or multiple suppliers

What is it used for? May be utilized on projects that require a substantial amount of technical specifications. The goal of an RFP is to secure highly specific proposals that will exactly meet Harvard's detailed requirements. A well-designed RFP will help determine which suppliers are most capable of meeting Harvard's complex needs ("process-sourcing" not just "price-sourcing").

What is involved? RFP's allow suppliers to propose different ideas or ways of performing specific aspects of the project. Supplier Performance and expertise are factors that lead to a higher level of quality, and negotiation provides the ability to obtain the best value. Also, leaving the implementation methods to the prospective bidders allows for increased innovation and customization of the project (they are the experts). Development of an RFP typically requires significant effort and commitment on the part of the sponsoring school/unit.

An RFP is used for highly complex projects and details the goals and nature of the project that need to be completed. Typically used for large-scale services engagements including, but not limited to, consulting projects, business process outsourcing or construction projects.

Federal procurement standards are significantly different than the RFP standards referenced in the guidance.