EFFECTIVELY EVALUATING POS AND PSA RFP RESPONSES

DECEMBER 14, 2021

TODAY'S TRAINING ROADMAP

What is the evaluation process for RFPs?

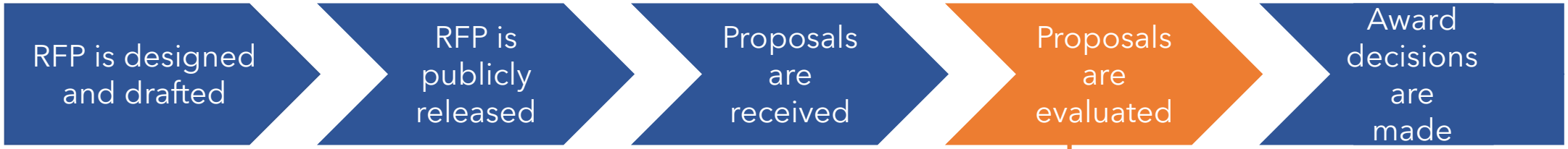
OPM standards and policies on POS/PSA evaluation

Common challenges in evaluation

Building a successful evaluation process

Evaluation tools and templates

WHAT IS PROPOSAL EVALUATION?



During a proposal evaluation period, a group of agency staff referred to as the **evaluation committee** read each proposal and score it based on pre-established **scoring criteria.**

Evaluation is important because:

- A robust proposal evaluation process helps your team select the best-suited vendor or provider.
- Evaluation is an opportunity to leverage your team's expertise, experience, and knowledge.
- Evaluation processes can surface issues with proposals or vendors that must be addressed through negotiation or contract management.
- Evaluation processes create legitimacy for procurement decisions.

RISKS OF EVALUATION PROCESSES

- Flashy, well-written proposals may make organizations look more qualified than they are
- Otherwise strong proposals may be ruled out for deviating from technical requirements, like formatting
- Proposals may not include key information that is necessary to make award decisions
- Evaluators may be affected by biases or conflicts of interest during scoring or discussion

The ultimate risk in any evaluation process is ***selecting a vendor who fails to meet the RFP's requirements***

OPM STANDARDS AND POLICIES

- Agencies have broad discretion over evaluation procedures
- OPM's POS and PSA Standards impose basic confidentiality and conflict-of-interest rules
- Proposal scores are non-binding recommendations to a Commissioner
- It is recommended that agencies establish their own debrief and appeals process

CHAT QUESTION

Have you run an evaluation process? What were the biggest challenges you faced?

COMMON EVALUATION CHALLENGES

Analyzing proposals can be subjective

- Reading for proposal content, not style
- Balancing objectivity and rigor with flexibility
- Asking specific, clear questions that collect the right information

Scoring criteria may be vague or unclear

- Describing “perfect” scores clearly to evaluators
- Calibrating evaluators to ensure scores are consistent
- Aligning evaluation processes with larger strategic agency goals

Evaluation committees are difficult to manage

- Managing the workload of reviewing proposals
- Engaging program, fiscal, budget, and operational expertise
- Ensuring discussion is fair, egalitarian, and timely

STAGES OF AN RFP EVALUATION

Establish **scoring criteria** that represent agency goals in the RFP

Write effective **questions** and **requirements** that connect to scoring criteria

Form a **committee** with **expertise** in the subject matter

Score and **discuss** the proposals you receive before making award decisions

We will discuss each of these stages by drawing on examples from the Office of Early Childhood's Home Visiting RFP

CREATE EFFECTIVE SCORING CRITERIA

Tips for writing scoring criteria

- Use criteria to signal **what's important** to the contract's success (e.g., equity, experience, innovation)
- Establish criteria prior to RFP release, and **list in the RFP** to inform respondents
- Each scoring criteria should be assigned a **weight** according to its importance
- An example of scoring criteria can be found in the standard OPM RFP Template

What the Office of Early Childhood did

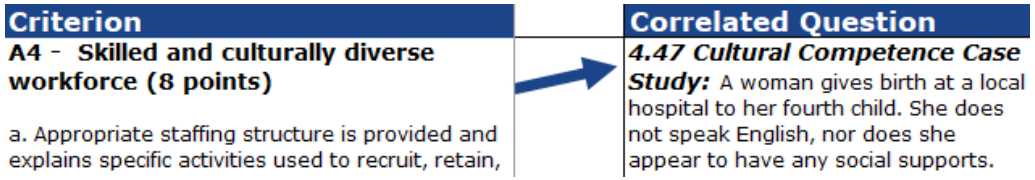
- The OEC facilitated discussions with a large stakeholder group to articulate the problem statement and outcomes. From those discussions, a smaller writing group developed criteria as well.
- Based on prior experience, the OEC wanted to be more specific in the criteria it articulated.
- The agency also deliberated the balance between transparency and how prescriptive it wanted the RFP to come across. It erred on the side of transparency.

DEVELOP QUESTIONS AND REQUIREMENTS

Tips for developing questions and criteria

- Align your questions and criteria to the **evaluation criteria**
- **Use case studies** or **ask for specific examples** that demonstrate past experiences to get responses that go beyond repeating the RFP's goals
- **Use plain language and keep the question format consistent** -- make sure it's obvious what you're asking applicants to respond to! Poorly worded questions elicit poor responses.

What the Office of Early Childhood did



- Visually **map out** each criterion and the questions/requirements to understand whether what you're asking accurately reflects what you want in a provider
- **Lesson learned:**
  - **Writing questions and criteria should be seen as one exercise**. Initially, the OEC wrote the questions separate from the criteria. For its next RFP, the OEC used the criteria to guide the creation of questions.

BUILD AN EVALUATION COMMITTEE

Tips for recruiting an evaluation committee

- An evaluation committee should be made up of 3-5 **agency staff.** You might consider:
  - **Program staff responsible for overseeing the contract**
  - **Staff with fiscal and budget knowledge**
  - **Staff with knowledge of the vendor/provider community**
- **Appoint a facilitator**, who does not evaluate proposals, to guide discussions
- Don't be afraid to bring in **technical advisors** to fill in gaps in the evaluation committee's knowledge

What the Office of Early Childhood did

- OEC created evaluation subcommittees by region, each made up of 4 OEC staff and one non-scoring facilitator. An evaluation leadership team also guided the process.
- **Lessons learned:**
  - Discuss and be upfront about **the time commitment** beforehand – talk to managers as needed. Create a "job description"
  - Be mindful of interpersonal dynamics

SCORE AND DISCUSS PROPOSALS

Tips for preparing to read and score proposals

- **Conduct an evaluator orientation** to walk through tools and processes, go over expectations, and level-set knowledge. Not all evaluators will start with the same understanding of a service or good.
- **Do some practice scoring exercises** to help calibrate scores between evaluators beforehand.
- **Provide a point of contact** for evaluators to support them as questions arise.
- **Structure and facilitate** the scoring discussion meeting to ensure fairness and mitigate biases

What the Office of Early Childhood did

- Evaluators scored independently and then convened in subcommittees, where initial scores were discussed
- Evaluators were given a chance to revise their scores
- **Lessons learned**
  - Keep proposals on hand to correct misinterpretations
  - Offer guidance on scoring for cost and other quantitative factors

FINALIZING THE EVALUATION PROCESS

- The top-scoring proposals are sent as **recommendations** to the Commissioner, who has final say on award decisions within this set of finalists
- Agencies should consider collecting **feedback** from evaluation participants to make process improvements and provide clarity on next steps
- Agencies may consider hosting **debriefing meetings** for unsuccessful proposers, to provide constructive feedback on their application and transparency about the evaluation process

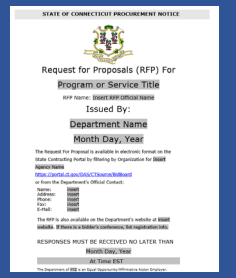
TOOLS TO SUPPORT PROPOSAL EVALUATION

OPM has developed tools to help standardize proposal evaluation and give agencies a roadmap through this challenging process

- The **POS and PSA RFP Templates** contain sections on evaluation that set agencies up for success when properly completed
- The new **Proposal Evaluation Workbook** offers a standardized tool to structure scoring and discussion
- The OPM-Finance team is available to provide **ad-hoc support**

① POS and PSA RFP Templates

Results-Driven POS RFP Template


STATE OF CONNECTICUT PROCUREMENT NOTICE

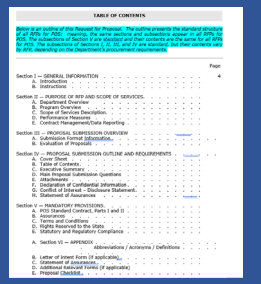
Request for Proposals (RFP) For

Program or Service Title

Issued By:

Department Name

Month Day, Year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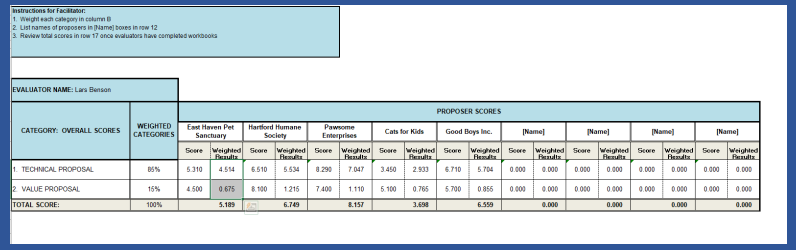
② Proposal Evaluation Workbook



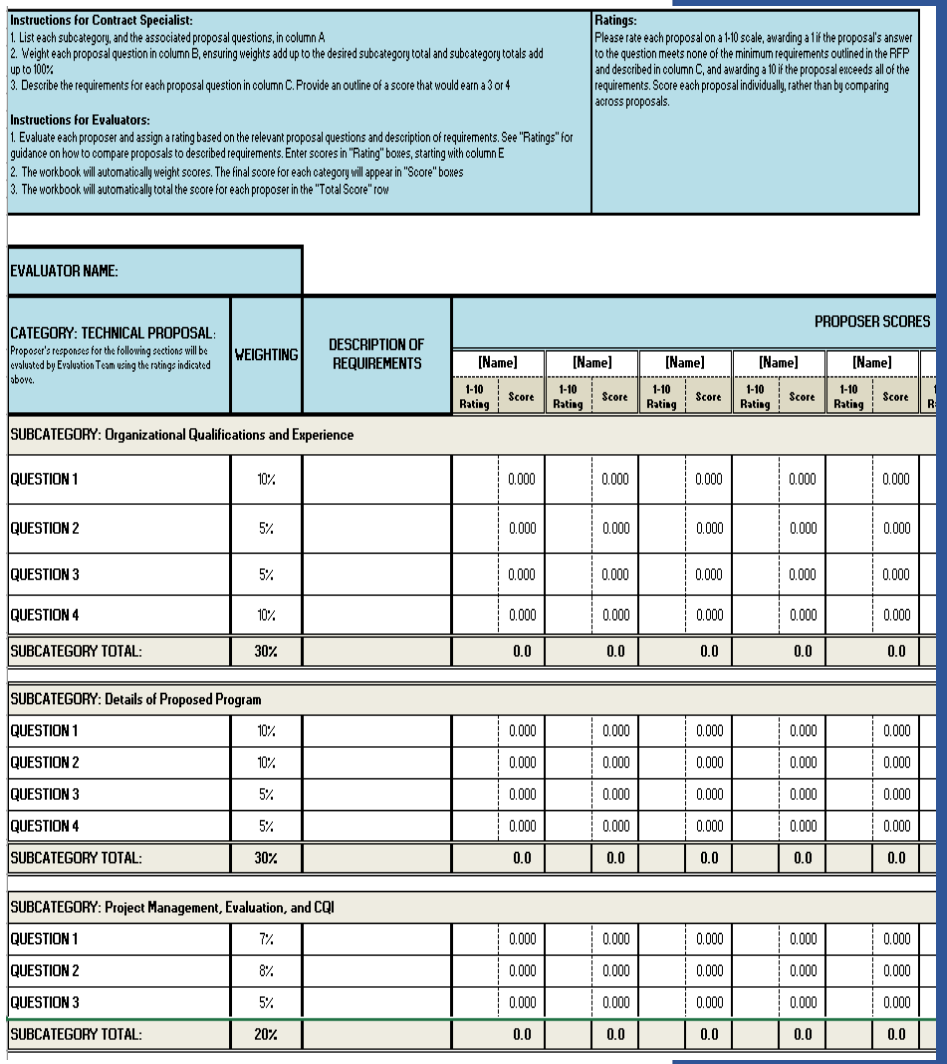
CATEGORY: OVERALL SCORES	WEIGHTED CATEGORIES	East Haven Pet Sanctuary		Hartford Humane Society		Pawsome Enterprises		Cats for Kids		Good Boys Inc.		[Name]		[Name]		[Name]		[Name]	
		Score	Weighted Results	Score	Weighted Results	Score	Weighted Results	Score	Weighted Results	Score	Weighted Results	Score	Weighted Results	Score	Weighted Results	Score	Weighted Results	Score	Weighted Results
1 TECHNICAL PROPOSAL	85%	5.310	4.514	6.510	5.534	8.290	7.047	3.450	2.933	6.710	5.704	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
2 VALUE PROPOSAL	15%	4.500	0.675	8.100	1.215	7.400	1.110	5.100	0.765	5.700	0.855	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
TOTAL SCORE:	100%		5.189		6.749		8.157		3.698		6.559		0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000

③ Lighter-Touch Technical Assistance

Guidebook: Crafting a **Results-Driven** Request for Proposals **(RFP)**

HARVARD Kennedy School Government Performance Lab

PROPOSAL EVALUATION WORKBOOK



Instructions for Contract Specialist:
1. List each subcategory, and the associated proposal questions, in column A
2. Weight each proposal question in column B, ensuring weights add up to the desired subcategory total and subcategory totals add up to 100%
3. Describe the requirements for each proposal question in column C. Provide an outline of a score that would earn a 3 or 4

Instructions for Evaluators:
1. Evaluate each proposer and assign a rating based on the relevant proposal questions and description of requirements. See "Ratings" for guidance on how to compare proposals to described requirements. Enter scores in "Rating" boxes, starting with column E
2. The workbook will automatically weight scores. The final score for each category will appear in "Score" boxes
3. The workbook will automatically total the score for each proposer in the "Total Score" row

Ratings:
Please rate each proposal on a 1-10 scale, awarding a 1 if the proposal's answer to the question meets none of the minimum requirements outlined in the RFP and described in column C, and awarding a 10 if the proposal exceeds all of the requirements. Score each proposal individually, rather than by comparing across proposals.

EVALUATOR NAME:

CATEGORY: TECHNICAL PROPOSAL: Proposer's responses for the following sections will be evaluated by Evaluation Team using the ratings indicated above.	WEIGHTING	DESCRIPTION OF REQUIREMENTS	PROPOSER SCORES [Name] 1-10 Rating	[Name] Score	[Name] 1-10 Rating	[Name] Score	[Name] 1-10 Rating	[Name] Score	[Name] 1-10 Rating	[Name] Score	[Name] 1-10 Rating	[Name] Score
SUBCATEGORY: Organizational Qualifications and Experience												
QUESTION 1	10%			0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000
QUESTION 2	5%			0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000
QUESTION 3	5%			0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000
QUESTION 4	10%			0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000
SUBCATEGORY TOTAL:	30%			0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0
SUBCATEGORY: Details of Proposed Program												
QUESTION 1	10%			0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000
QUESTION 2	10%			0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000
QUESTION 3	5%			0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000
QUESTION 4	5%			0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000
SUBCATEGORY TOTAL:	30%			0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0
SUBCATEGORY: Project Management, Evaluation, and CQI												
QUESTION 1	7%			0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000
QUESTION 2	8%			0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000
QUESTION 3	5%			0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000
SUBCATEGORY TOTAL:	20%			0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0		0.0

The OPM Proposal Evaluation Workbook can make RFP evaluation processes more efficient for government staff. Benefits include:

- Provide support for agencies less familiar with evaluations
- Create a more standardized experience for evaluators
- Leave flexibility for agencies to customize
- Include tips and strategies for facilitating effective evaluation meetings

The workbook is an optional tool, and OPM welcomes feedback as agencies utilize for their upcoming solicitations

DAS PROCUREMENT EVALUATION PROCESS

- Agencies may also work with DAS to evaluate procurements for master contracts or goods
- DAS Contract Specialists are trained procurement experts that can guide your agency through the evaluation process and facilitate scoring
- When you work with DAS on a procurement, your assigned Contract Specialist will convene a Sourcing Team of members from your agency, and help you select Evaluators from that team

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

with Connecticut Procurement Leaders

Julia Fusfeld, OPM
Cathy Lenihan, OEC
Sheila Hummel, DECD

WHO DO I CONTACT AT OPM/FINANCE FOR HELP?

①

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②

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CTSOURCE REMINDER

Agencies must post all competitive procurement opportunities to CTsource, the new state contracting portal.

CTsource features include:

- Monitoring vendor interest
- Posting and distributing RFPs
- Running Q&As
- Reading and scoring proposals

Upcoming updates to CTsource will allow agencies to evaluate vendor performance and read other agencies' vendor evaluations

THANK YOU!
PLEASE FILL OUT OUR SURVEY