

8. Procurement

8-A. Introduction and Policy

First Steps' legislation [section 59-152-150 (A)] states that the “accountability system shall require competitive bids for the purchase or procurement of goods and services of ten thousand dollars or more.”

Competitive bids ensure that:

- 1) Quality criteria are used to evaluate any potential vendor and provider;
- 2) All interested vendors or providers are aware of opportunities to provide needed goods and/or services;
- 3) Fair and equitable treatment is provided to all potential vendors or providers and;
- 4) All potential vendors (“vendors refers to public and private providers) in local communities have a reasonable opportunity to contract with you.

The South Carolina First Steps Board of Trustees has determined that the competitive bid process shall apply to the acquisition of goods and services through First Steps from private or public providers.

First Steps procurement procedures, samples of a bid request, a cover letter, a sample scoring tool, and a sample newspaper advertisement are presented in the appendix to this chapter to guide you in developing these documents.

8-B. Bid Process

First Steps County Partnership Bid Process

Legislation requires that all First Steps County Partnerships use a competitive bid process for the purchase or procurement of goods and services valued at \$10,000 or more from private and public vendors, including those acquired through grants by the county partnership.

Competitive bids promote the following goals:

- Quality criteria are used to evaluate vendors;
 - Interested vendors are aware of opportunities to provide needed goods and/or services;
 - Fair and equitable treatment is provided to potential vendors;
 - Provision of quality services to children and families; and
 - The efficient use of available resources.
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To contract for goods or services valued at \$10,000 or more, you must request bids from vendors.

Below are step-by-step directions to assist you in developing and implementing your partnership's bidding process. Please contact the SC First Steps Office if you have any questions about this process or need further assistance.

The bidding process consists of 7 steps:

- 1) Develop **CRITERIA FOR QUALITY GOODS AND SERVICES** consistent with any applicable guidelines that have been announced by the First Steps State Board of Trustees.
- 2) Select an **EVALUATION COMMITTEE** to review the bids.
 - a. An odd number of no less than three shall serve on this committee.
 - b. Persons selected should have relevant expertise and must have no conflict of interest with potential vendors.
 - c. A roster of the evaluation committee, including names and affiliations, should be kept on file.
- 3) Develop a **SCORE SHEET** to evaluate all prospective vendors. (See *Attachment A* for a sample Score Sheet.) Score Sheets must include 4 components:
 - a. Criteria for quality goods and services
 - b. Vendor qualifications
 - c. Scope of work
 - d. Cost of goods or services

4. **DEVELOP and ADVERTISE** your request for bids. (See *Attachment B* for a sample Bid Request.)
The evaluation committee should decide on a timeline for the bidding process.

- a. Request for bids **must** include the following information:
1. Background and problem statement
 2. The quality criteria your local board desires in a vendor's goods or services
(IMPORTANT!)
 3. Vendor qualifications
 4. Scope of work
 5. Bidding period (specify the closing date and time for bids and the date, time, and location of your public meeting)
 6. All other required specifics. For example, you may specify that vendor proposals be limited to 3 pages or you may require 3 references.
- b. Advertise your request for bids *at least once* in a newspaper of general circulation in the county and other publications as necessary to inform your community and potential vendors of the bid opportunity and schedule. (See *Attachment C* for a sample newspaper advertisement.) Partnerships must allow at least fifteen (15) calendar days between the first date of publication of the bid and the closing date.

You may also wish to send letters to prospective vendors. (See *Attachment D* for a sample letter to prospective vendors.)

- c. As bids are received, **DO NOT OPEN THEM**. Log the time, date received, and file bids in a secure manner until the public meeting, at which time all bids will be opened. Bids received after the closing date and time should be logged in, but are not to be considered or opened and should be returned to the vendor.

OPTIONAL: *Your partnership board may determine that a **pre-proposal conference** or **bidder's workshop** may be necessary to appropriately inform prospective vendors of the bid opportunity. These workshops provide an opportunity for direct communication with potential vendors on quality needs in a given service area. If you decide to offer this session, include the pre-proposal conference date in your bid advertisement. The pre-proposal conference must review all bid requirements (including quality criteria, scope of service, and budget information) and the bid process. Please contact SC First Steps Office for any assistance in planning a successful pre-proposal workshop.*

5. Conduct a public meeting for the **BID OPENING**.

- All bids must be kept sealed until this meeting.
- Provide a sign-in sheet to be signed by all present at this meeting.
- Note on the *bid log* the date opened.

6. EVALUATE bid proposals using the scoring sheet and **SELECT THE VENDOR**.

- a. Bids should be scored according to criteria established by your partnership board and evaluation committee. These criteria should be consistent with any applicable guidelines that have been announced by the First Steps State Board of Trustees.
- b. Each evaluation committee member should score each vendor using the Score Sheet and cumulative scores should be tabulated. The committee should evaluate proposals based on qualifications, description of services, and cost. Please keep in mind that if one vendor has the highest total score, but has a higher price, that bid may still be selected by a majority vote of the county partnership board. When this occurs, written justification must be recorded explaining how other criteria outweighed the cost factor and kept on file along with all other scoring information. The written justification also must be promptly filed with SC First Steps Office.
- c. References should be contacted before the scoring can be considered complete. One member of the committee should call a reasonable number of references, compile reference notes, and present this information to the committee. It is important that all references be asked the same questions regarding potential vendors.
- d. The evaluation committee will make a recommendation to the county partnership board based on the vendor with the highest score, except as explained in b., above. The board then will make a decision on the award. The evaluation committee will provide the board with all scoring materials. If the committee determines that a bid is non-responsive to the request for bids, it may recommend to the board that the bid not be considered.
- e. The county partnership board may negotiate the price, scope of work, and other terms after awarding the contract to the vendor with the highest score or other vendor selected as set forth in 6, above.
- f. After a vendor has been selected by the board, letters of intent should be mailed to **all bidders**. (See Attachment E for a sample Letter of Intent.) The award becomes official after a waiting period of seven (7) days from the mailing of the letter of intent.
- g. The county partnership board may withdraw the request for bids or reject all bids at any time or may withdraw an award at any time prior to the execution of the contract. This should be clearly stated in the request for bids.

h. Request to Review the Award

1. To request the review of a contract award, an applicant must submit a letter requesting review to the Executive Director. The letter must be received by the Executive Director within seven (7) consecutive calendar days from the date of the intent to award letter. Letters must include specific meritorious reasons and supporting documentation justifying the review of the award or the request may be declined.
2. A final decision regarding request for review that has been accepted must be reached by the county partnership board within twenty (20) consecutive calendar days after receipt of the written request and a letter must be sent to the applicant indicating the decision and the basis for the decision. If needed, the Executive Director will schedule a meeting with the applicant to review the award. This meeting should be held within ten (10) consecutive calendar days after receipt of the written request for review. The applicant has the right at this time to view all responses/proposals, information such as scoring, and any documentation pertaining to scoring collected by the evaluation committee, except information and records privileged under law (e.g. legal advice). The county partnership must respond to the requesting party in writing with a decision within thirty (30) consecutive calendar days from the date of the review meeting, if such a meeting is conducted.

NOTE: The public may view ALL scoring information, including any notations made by the evaluators, upon request. County partnerships must keep all information related to a given bid filed at the local county partnership.

7. Develop a **CONTRACT**. (See *Attachment F* for a sample vendor contract.)

The following items must be kept on file at the local County Partnership office for a minimum of 3 years:

- Copy of the request for bids.
- Advertisement of the request for bids.
- Names and professional affiliations of evaluation committee members.
- Sign-in sheet for bid opening public meeting.
- Original vendor proposals.
- Score sheets and all scoring information.
- Copy of the contract with the selected vendor.

8-C. Score Sheet

ATTACHMENT A

Sample Score Sheet

Vendor Name:			
Date:			
Reviewer's Name:			
Name of Service:			
<u>A. Quality Criteria</u>	<u>Possible Points</u>	<u>Score</u>	<u>Comments</u>
Maximum total points:			
Insert criteria here, developed by your partnership, to achieve quality service to children and families. Quality criteria have been developed for many First Steps and early education programs and services. Samples are included in this section.			
TOTAL POINTS QUALITY CRITERIA:			
<u>B. Vendor Qualifications</u>	<u>Possible Points</u>	<u>Score</u>	<u>Comments</u>
Maximum total points:			
Has the vendor previously preformed similar work? Are results available for review? Are staff qualified to perform service, based on quality criteria? Does the proposal contain required references and documentation of experience or education of staff?			
TOTAL POINTS VENDOR QUALIFICATIONS:			
<u>C. Scope of Work</u>	<u>Possible Points</u>	<u>Score</u>	<u>Comments</u>
Maximum total points:			
Has vendor proposed sufficient time to complete the required quality work? Has the applicant proposed adequate staff or other resources to complete the work? Does the proposal reflect a			

thorough understanding of the desired outcome? Does the proposal offer adequate methods for evaluation and adjustment? Other: _____			
TOTAL POINTS SCOPE OF WORK:			
<u>D. Cost</u>	<u>Possible Points</u>	<u>Score</u>	<u>Comments</u>
Maximum total points:			
<i>Insert your requirements here:</i>			
TOTAL POINTS COST:			

8-D. Sample Bid Request

ATTACHMENT B

Sample Bid Request
**BID FOR _____ SERVICES,
_____ COUNTY FIRST STEPS
PARTNERSHIP BOARD**

PART I: BACKGROUND and PROBLEM STATEMENT

The Background should include but is not limited to a brief discussion of the following:
MISSION AND GOALS of your County Partnership,
NEED STATEMENT of a particular problem in your county and how your partnership plans to address the problem,
QUALITY CRITERIA required for successful intervention, and
OUTCOMES expected as a result of implementing the strategy/service.

PART II: BID REQUIREMENTS

A. SCOPE OF WORK

This section should specifically describe the purpose of your bid request and include the following:

1. Target population.
2. Service Delivery area(s).
3. Expected Outcome or evaluation requirements.
4. Quality Criteria

Applicable guidelines adopted by the State Board of Trustees and quality criteria for prevalent programs among First Steps Partnerships may be found in the service templates. These were developed across South Carolina in collaboration with experts and partners in school readiness. Ongoing research and the emerging school readiness outcomes and indicators for the state of South Carolina will require updates of service templates and quality criteria.

5. List any specific deliverables required by potential vendors, including but not limited to:
 - a. Provide services to ___ children and their families.
 - b. Specific service models, curriculum, or service standards that the potential Contractor must adhere to.
 - c. Specific evaluation and reporting requirements.
 - d. Type of training and required hours of training to be provided, and to whom.
 - e. Coordination of services with specific agencies/organizations.
 - f. Dates of required service, or the agreement period.

It is critical that all potential vendors be made aware of all programmatic and service provision reporting requirements through the bid process.

B. VENDOR QUALIFICATIONS

Potential Contractors should provide written information or documentation on their ability to meet all of the required qualifications. Minimum requirements may include:

1. Educational requirements of staff.
2. Years of experience delivering service.
3. Staffing ratio requirements.
4. Office/equipment requirements.
5. Child care providers must meet:
 - a. South Carolina licensing/regulatory requirements, and
 - b. Advocates for Better Child Care (ABC) Enhanced Program Standards or NAEYC Accreditation Standards
6. Ability to receive reimbursement for services.
7. Insurance coverages (if required).

C. COST

1. Total cost.
2. List each item or unit of cost with amount of cost.
3. Specify payment schedule requested.

PART III: BID REQUIRED INFORMATION

The potential contractor shall provide the following information with their responses:

1. A description of how the potential contractor will implement the services/activities in the Scope of Work. Include a timeline with projected dates for beginning and completing work.
2. A brief narrative explaining past experiences in conducting the activities in the Scope of Work and serving the target population.
3. A resume including education and experience (corporations, organizations, or associations should provide resumes for each individual that may provide the service (if applicable, include certifications).
4. At least three professional references that includes phone numbers and addresses.
5. Documentation that supports that the potential contractor is solvent, for example, financial statements.
6. A proposal of cost, which includes the budget and a budget justification.
7. A signed cover letter with the original and five (5) copies of response, including all attachments/appendices.



8-E. Sample Newspaper Advertisement

ATTACHMENT C

Sample Newspaper Advertisement

Bids are being solicited by the _____ County First Steps Partnership Board for consultative services. Consultants will provide expertise and assist with the development of needs and resources assessments, as well as a strategic plan regarding school readiness and support services that are critical to children being successful in school. Consultants will also have an integral role in developing a grant application including a request for funding from the State Office of First Steps to implement needed services identified through the assessment processes. The deadline for submittals is (enter date) by the hour of (enter time). A pre-proposal conference will be held on (date) at (time) at (place, complete with address). To request a copy of the bid request please contact _____ (contact person, include address, room number, if applicable, and telephone number). Bids will be opened publicly at (time), on (date), location (name of office, address and room number).



8-F. Sample Letter To Prospective Vendors

ATTACHMENT D

Sample Letter to Prospective Vendors

Dear Potential Vendor:

This document is a bid request for the provision of consultant services to the _____ County First Steps Partnership Board. A scope of work, a description of minimum qualifications, and a list of key event dates are enclosed.

Information regarding vendor qualifications must be submitted to the _____ County First Steps Partnership Board at the address below no later than (date), (time), local time. After this date, no further information will be accepted from prospective applicants.

This bid request does not commit the _____ County First Steps Partnership Board to issue a contract, or to procure/contract for any services specified herein. Further, the _____ County First Steps Partnership Board will not reimburse applicants for any costs incurred in the preparation of their responses.

The _____ County First Steps Partnership Board assumes no responsibility for unmarked or incorrectly marked envelopes or packaging containing any bids or responses from applicants. If you have any questions or concerns please call (*insert the name of the board chairperson*) at (*insert the phone telephone number*).

We hope that you will submit a proposal in response to this bid request as we seek to provide quality services to the children and families across the state. It will take all of us working together to improve the school readiness of South Carolina's children.

Mail or hand-deliver responses to:

_____ County Partnership Board
Mailing Address

Sincerely,



8-G. Sample Letter of Intent to Award

ATTACHMENT E

Sample Letter of Intent to Award

Date:

Issue Date: (Issuing Date of BID REQUEST)

Opening Date: (Public opening date)

Description: (Enter Service Name)

Awarded To: Insert name and address of Contractor

Contract amount: Insert total amount to be paid to Contractor

Contract period: Insert length of time that you will contract with the Contractor
(i.e., 7/1/2004 through 6/30/2005).

Bidders Option to Request Review: Any actual bidder who is aggrieved in connection with the intended award of a contract may request a review of the award by delivering a letter to the _____ County Partnership Board requesting such review. The letter must be delivered within seven (7) calendar days of the issuance of the notification of award and must include specific reasons, with supporting documentation, why the review is requested

The _____ County First Steps Partnership Board reserves the right to negotiate final terms of the contract with the selected Contractor and to withdraw the award at any time prior to the execution of the contract.

(Should be signed by the board chairperson or designee.)