RivetCONNECT

Request for Proposal Guide:
Writing Effective Curriculum-Based Professional Learning RFPs

It is easy to underestimate the power of requests for proposals (RFPs). The RFP process— from drafting to contracting— can feel overwhelming, bureaucratic, and unnecessarily cumbersome. Just getting an RFP out the door can feel like a win, but quality matters. **When done well, RFPs are an important lever that education leaders can use to provide more effective support for teachers and to improve student outcomes.**

We also know that adopting and implementing high-quality instructional materials (HQIM)[1] can be a daunting task, and education leaders often benefit from partnering with one or more qualified organizations to help them navigate the complex change-management process. In many cases, identifying and contracting with a qualified organization requires LEAs and SEAs to engage in an RFP process.

Unfortunately, state and local education agencies (SEAs and LEAs) often struggle to write strong RFPs. A recent analysis of RFPs in the market conducted by **Rivet Education** uncovered that over 60 percent of the proposals released are not high-quality. Poor-quality RFPs increase the likelihood of low-quality bids from unqualified vendors. Strong RFPs, on the other hand, are more likely to result in

High-Quality Vendor Pool　　　**Effective Use of SEAs' and LEAs' Time and Money**　　　**Strong Results for Students and Teachers**

RivetCONNECT's RFP Guide supports SEAs and LEAs in developing RFPs related to curriculum-based professional learning. This guide focuses on RFPs related to these services because research shows that providing educators with strong materials and curriculum-based professional learning is one of the most effective ways to improve the quality of teaching and learning in classrooms.[2] This tool is designed to help. It includes:

Characteristics of Effective Professional Learning RFPs

Components of Effective Professional Learning RFPs

Steps of an Effective RFP Process

---

[1] Rivet defines HQIM in ELA, Math, and science as those rated "Meets Expectations" on EdReports in all grade levels for their grade band. Rivet also defines HQIM in science as those that are rated "High Quality NGSS Design" or "High Quality NGSS Design if Improved" on the EQuIP rubric and have at least two units per grade band.

[2] Steiner, D., Magee, J. & Jensen, B. (2018, November). *What We Teach Matters: How Quality Curriculum Improves Student Outcomes*. Learning First and Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy.

Characteristics of Effective Professional Learning RFPs

RFPs should reflect SEAs' and LEAs' specific needs and local contexts. However, there are many characteristics that strong RFPs related to curriculum-based professional learning share, regardless of context.[3]

☐ **Describe a clear vision** for instruction in classrooms across their system and how they see HQIM supporting that vision.

☐ **Clearly define the goals** the LEA/SEA is trying to achieve or the problem they are trying to solve through a contract with an outside professional learning organization.

☐ **Demand high-quality, effective professional learning** that is deeply connected to both the content and the specific HQIM that educators use and that reflects best practices for adult learning, such as coaching from experts, opportunities for collaboration, practice, feedback, and reflection.

☐ Set the expectation that professional learning should **address the needs of educators at every level of the system**, from teachers to school and district leaders.

☐ **Prioritize sustainability** by requiring providers to commit to building the LEA's/SEA's capacity to continue supporting teachers and leaders in their learning after the contract ends.

☐ Contain clear and realistic information about
   ❏ **Budget**, such as the total amount and how proposed budgets will be evaluated;
   ❏ **Timeline** for when work and deliverables need to be completed; and
   ❏ **Limitations and requirements**, such as required formats, already planned dates for professional learning, or other LEA/SEA requirements that will impact the delivery of professional learning.

☐ **Prioritize the quality of professional learning** among the criteria used to evaluate proposals.

---

[3] Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy. (2020, June). The Importance of District and State RFPs: Effective Professional Learning to Support High-Quality Curriculum Implementation.

Components of Effective Professional Learning RFPs

To increase the likelihood that RFPs reflect the characteristics above, LEAs and SEAs should consider including the following components in their RFPs. LEAs/SEAs may choose to reorder these components to meet their needs. Rivet has developed a **template** **to support LEAs and SEAs in drafting this content, including guiding questions and examples**.

- ☐ **Introduction:** Summary of the purpose of the RFP, including an abridged description of the services you aim to procure.

- ☐ **Background and Context:** Information relevant to the services you aim to procure, such as the demographics of your LEA/SEA, your academic vision, background on why you are procuring these services, and past or current initiatives and projects related to the scope of work described in your RFP.

- ☐ **Goals/outcomes:** Define what success will look like at the end of the project or completion of services and how vendors will be held accountable for the deliverables outlined in the scope of work.

- ☐ **Scope of Work:** A vague or poorly defined scope of work is one of the most common pitfalls of RFPs; it is also the one pitfall most likely to result in low-quality bids and an unsuccessful project. The scope of work should clearly describe the services and deliverables you expect to receive and how they will achieve the goals outlined in the previous section.

- ☐ **RFP Timeline:** Key dates and deadlines of the RFP process, such as the due date for proposals, the selection window, the date by which bidders will be notified, the predicted contracting window, and the date you expect the work to begin.

- ☐ **Required Qualifications:** Minimum qualifications that bidders must meet to be eligible to win the contract and that are required to ensure the success of the project or services.

- ☐ **Methodology for Evaluating and Scoring Proposals:** A simple rubric outlining the criteria for the success of the project, including:
    - ❏ Bidder's understanding of the project goals, scope of work, risks, and constraints;
    - ❏ Quality of bidder's approach and methodology of services/deliverables, including risk mitigation strategies;
    - ❏ Bidder's experience with projects similar in size, scope, technical requirements, and function to the proposed contract;
    - ❏ Staff qualifications and expertise in areas that are especially relevant to the scope of work (e.g., the science of reading);
    - ❏ Bidder's ability to meet cost and timeline requirements.

- ☐ **Submission Requirements:** Specific instructions for what bidders need to submit and how.

- ☐ **State or Local Requirements and Legal Notifications:** Standard legal language and requirements must be included in the RFP per state or local guidelines.

Steps of an Effective RFP Process

Follow the steps below to ensure the RFP process runs smoothly and efficiently, encourages multiple strong bids, and results in selecting the best vendor.

1. **Define RFP purpose and objectives.** Start by clearly and succinctly defining what you hope to accomplish through the project. What will be true by the end of it? What problem(s) are you trying to solve? Why will partnering with an outside vendor be important to the project's success?

2. **Identify and invest stakeholders in the process.** The success of your RFP and project will likely depend on involving key stakeholders early and often. A stakeholder is anyone who can influence the success or failure of the project starting with drafting the RFP all the way through to the end of the project. This can include people responsible for doing work related to the project, people who have authority to red or green light the project, people from whom you will need support or input, and people who may not *directly* influence the project but whose opinions and investments matter. The following is a non-exhaustive list of potential stakeholders and may include:
   - ☐ Others on your team
   - ☐ People on other teams in your LEA/SEA (e.g. those who run related initiatives)
   - ☐ Educators impacted by the work (e.g. teachers, instructional coaches, directors of professional development, principals, etc.)
   - ☐ State or local school boards

3. **Meet with your finance/procurement office.** Before sitting down to draft your RFP, meet with your finance and/or procurement team to make sure you understand any required documents (e.g., RFP templates), procedures (e.g., posting and review requirements), and policies (e.g., blackout periods). This is also a good opportunity to confirm the budget for the project.

4. **Write the RFP.** Use the characteristics of effective RFPs and the required forms from your finance/procurement team to draft your RFP. Rivet has also created a template to help you draft the programmatic portions of your RFP. Make sure your timelines allow for iteration based on feedback from the stakeholders listed above.

5. **Release the RFP.** Many SEAs and LEAs have policies regarding where and how long RFPs must be posted. Work with your finance/procurement office to release the RFP per those requirements. Keep in mind that a very short application window may limit the quality and quantity of bids you receive. Additionally, post your RFP in **ServiceCONNECT** to ensure qualified bidders are notified about your opportunity.

6. **Plan for the review process.** Depending on your timeline, this step can be done either before you release the RFP or while you are waiting for vendors to submit bids.
   - ☐ Establish a review team of representatives from the stakeholder groups mentioned above.

☐ Create a project plan that outlines the timeline, methodology (e.g., voting or consensus model), and participants in the decision-making process.

☐ Train the selection committee on the rubric, the characteristics of effective RFPs, and the criteria of high-quality curriculum-based professional learning, and have them norm on what to expect to see in the responses for each component of the RFP.

7. **Review bidders' proposals and select your vendor(s).** Once the bid deadline has passed, the cross-functional review team can begin deciding which vendor(s) best meets the criteria and requirements outlined in the RFP.

8. **Notify and contract with the selected vendor(s).** Share the good news with the vendor(s) you selected and work with your finance/procurement team to engage in contract negotiations.

9. **Onboard your vendor(s).** After the contract is signed but before services begin, you should hold a kick-off meeting with your new professional learning partner to align the goals and objectives of your partnership. Check out Rivet's Steps to Selecting A High-Quality Professional Learning Partner for additional guidance on planning your vendor kick-off meeting.

Looking for additional support?

Here are some steps you can take to ensure you receive quality bids from the best vendors.

1. Purchase a Plus or Premium ServiceCONNECT membership to receive customized, 1:1 support in crafting a clear, coherent, and quality RFP.

2. Watch our short videos on the characteristics, components, and steps of an effective RFP process.

3. Use our RFP template to make drafting your RFP easier.

4. Check out Rivet's framework for high-quality professional learning and our curated list of research and resources.

Rivet Education's mission is to define high-quality professional learning and create tools and services that support state and local education agencies in putting that definition into practice. Our nationally recognized team understands HQIM and curriculum-based professional learning and has seen what works and what doesn't.

For additional details, view our ServiceCONNECT membership page or contact us today with questions.

RE
RIVET
EDUCATION