

KEYS TO DEVELOPING A SUCCESSFUL SOURCES SOUGHT/REQUEST FOR INFORMATION NOTICE

1. **Identify the sources** you are seeking or the reason you are publishing the notice. Be specific and clear.
2. **Define the requirement** in one paragraph or less – a simple summary of the need (and attach the SOW or PWS). If any major changes are made to the SOW later, a new notice should be issued.
3. **Provide background.** Has this been bought before? Has the scope changed from the last contract? If this is a new requirement, what has generated the need for the buy?
4. **Identify the key tasks as bullets** that are required to do the job. These should be the tasks necessary for the requirement and used to determine capability of respondents. If a specific level of experience in these tasks is required, that should be stated. State what you consider to be demonstrating capability. If you and the vendor define capability differently, the sources sought will not be an accurate assessment of the market. If you don't tell the vendor what you are looking for, he/she may express capability but not in your terms, creating an inaccurate assessment. Do you require contract numbers and scope to be cited? How many contracts do you want to see to show capability? Do you need a description of the contract? Don't assume the vendor knows what you want to see.
5. **List other key criteria that are critical for capability**, without which the vendor is not capable. These should be things such as certificates, technical training, equipment and anything else that is tangible and verifiable. State that the vendor should identify whether or not he/she has these items. State if proof or references are required.
6. **Address any special elements** which are unique and outside the normal commercial capabilities – that normal commercial experience may not demonstrate.
7. **Cite the subcontract limitation** for the type of requirement being sought. Request that vendors identify the percentage of work they would have to subcontract to meet capability and the key elements that would likely be subcontracted.
8. **Identify if there is a limit to the number of pages** for the response to the sources sought. Bear in mind that limiting the pages can limit a vendor's ability to show capability. He/She must choose what fits in that amount of space. Consider how many pages it will take for a vendor to respond. A good way to obtain all necessary information is to advise the vendor to address the key tasks and criteria in the limited space and to attach any additional information that can support the capability. Then that can be viewed if the information is not sufficient in the limited pages.

EVALUATING SOURCES SOUGHT RESPONSES

Evaluations should be impartial. Words like ‘confidence’, ‘trust’, ‘seemed’, ‘hesitant’, ‘may not’ suggest a subjective evaluation which can be construed to be an assessment of responsibility rather than a general assessment of capability. You are assessing minimum necessary capability, not “best sources”. Quality of past performance is also an element of responsibility and does not belong in the evaluation of capability.

The evaluation should be done by the Contracting Officer. While the Requisitioner may develop the SOW, identify critical elements to success etc., once those elements are defined and identified in the sources sought, the contracting officer should do the evaluation, based on the elements identified. The sources sought should be sufficient that customer involvement is not necessary to determine capability. A good sources sought is clearly defined and easily evaluated. Allowing the customer to evaluate the sources sought increases risk that the information may be skewed to support a favored vendor or desired outcome. The Contracting Officer can remain impartial in evaluation.

Utilizing a chart to show the capability determination can help to make a good determination and keep the evaluation impartial. The chart should have a column for each task that is critical, and other critical criteria. If the vendor has demonstrated those elements they can be checked off (remember the sources sought identified what was required to show capability). A final column should show the determination of capable or not capable and contain comments explaining what elements are lacking that make the vendor not capable of performing.

Vendor	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3	Criteria 1	Criteria 2	Limit on Subcont.	Capable (Y or N)	Comments

Teaming: Vendors subcontract and team to accomplish tasks. A prime vendor does not have to meet all criteria to be determined capable. He/She can hire others with skills he/she is lacking in. As subcontractors, they can fulfill contract needs the same as the prime vendor. The prime vendor is only obligated to meet the limitations on subcontracting. A vendor should be determined capable if he/she meets a requirement and will remain within the subcontract limitations. If the limitation on subcontracting is 50% and the vendor is lacking in two tasks but indicates that he/she is subcontracting and will do at least 65% of the work, the vendor should be determined capable. A vendor should not be determined incapable just because he/she lacks a few skills, until you know if he/she is going to subcontract and meet the limitations on subcontracting.

Follow up: If a vendor appears generally capable but failed to address an element, or more information could enable the vendor to be capable, the contracting officer should contact the vendor to obtain the information. A sources sought is NOT a bid. There is no restriction on communication with a vendor. If information is needed or can enhance a response determination, it should be made. It is the obligation of the contracting officer to obtain the information necessary to make a good determination.