

# Bidder's Guide

Responding  
to a  
Request for Proposal



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# Introduction

This guide is designed to answer questions commonly asked by potential contractors about responding to a Request for Proposal. It covers only those Requests for Proposal issued by the Nasittuq North Warning System (NWS) Contracts department.

The intent of this document is to provide guidance to bidders for submission of successful proposals. Nothing in here is intended to relieve bidders from forming their own opinions and conclusions about the best way to respond to our Request for Proposal.

## North Warning System

The mission of the North Warning System (NWS) is to detect airborne objects within the NWS surveillance area, provide attack warning and assessment data on these objects to the Region Operations Control Centre (ROCC) and to provide radar surveillance and a command and control capability for the Air Defence Identification Zone.

The NWS in Canada consists of eleven (11) unattended Long Range Radar (LRR) sites and thirty-six (36) unattended Short Range Radar (SRR) sites from the north shore of the Yukon to the southeast shore of Labrador. Sites are maintained and supported by five Logistic Support Sites (LSS) situated in Inuvik, Cambridge Bay, Hall Beach, Iqaluit and Goose Bay.

Typical LRR and SRR sites are in remote locations and in most cases can only be accessed by helicopter or fixed wing transportation. The main components consists of the radar, long haul communication system and support communication equipment. The site facilities consist of building(s) and their integral mechanical and electrical systems, power generation systems, fuel tank farms, radar towers, antennas, satellite ground terminals, weather sensor compounds, roads, helipads and beach resupply facilities.

Since 1988, we have been contracted by the Government of Canada to operate and maintain the NWS. Under the current agreement Nasittuq has the mandate to prepare additional work requirements and solicit request for proposals on behalf of the Government of Canada for various projects.

# The Request for Proposal process

## Request for Proposal versus Invitation to Quote

### What is a Request for Proposal?

A Request for Proposal is a formal solicitation document inviting binding proposals for delivery of a service or project. It may be used when:

- a) Nasittuq has a situation for which it is not sure of the best solution;
- b) in selection of a contractor Nasittuq wishes to consider factors other than price;
- c) Nasittuq would like to see what the industry suggests;
- d) the requirement is complex;
- e) the requirement is new and Nasittuq would like ideas on how to deliver it; or
- f) Nasittuq would like to see if there is an alternative to the way it usually acquires the product or service.

### How does a Request for Proposal differ from an Invitation to Quote?

The Request for Proposal differs from the Invitation to Quote in that with a Request for Proposal, Nasittuq evaluates responses against a variety of criteria, as opposed to an Invitation to Quote where the winner is generally the lowest bidder who meets the specification. In the Request for Proposal, price is generally just one of the evaluation criteria. Other criteria could include such factors as the bidder's experience, skills of the proposed project team, appropriateness and creativity of the proposed solution, Aboriginal commitment or the bidder's sensitivity to the needs of Nasittuq and its client.

## The Process

### What steps does the Request for Proposal go through?

The following bullets roughly chart the steps in the process:

- Nasittuq or the Government identifies a need
- Design and specification is prepared and approved for tendering
- The Request for Proposal is drafted and evaluation criteria determined
- Expression of Interest is issued to potential bidders and construction associations
- The Request for Proposal is issued
- Proposals are received and evaluated
- A winner is selected
- A contract is negotiated and signed
- Unsuccessful proponents notified
- Work is performed

**What if I win then decide I don't want the job? Will I be free to back out?**

No, you will have to decide before the closing date whether or not you are serious about submitting a proposal. You can amend or withdraw a proposal up until the closing time, but at the stated closing time all proposals become irrevocable.

**How long can I expect the process to take?**

From the time you first see the Request for Proposal, it could be 1-2 months before a contract is signed. However, the length of the process varies significantly from project to project as well as the urgency to implement the work.

## **The document**

**What information do I get from the Request for Proposal?**

The Request for Proposal will usually explain the role of Nasittuq, describe the background of the project, outline some of the problems Nasittuq is facing, describe the scope of the project, and provide the parameters for submission of solutions. It will describe how proposals will be evaluated and state the terms and conditions for proposal acceptance and contract award. It will also tell you to whom you should address questions.

## **Insurance**

The contract usually requires contractors to indemnify Nasittuq and the Government against any losses it incurs as a result of the contractor's activities in performing the contract. To ensure that contractors fulfil this indemnity, we require evidence of adequate liability insurance. Arrangement and payment of this insurance are the contractor's responsibility.

# Proposal preparation

## Content

### What makes one proposal better than another?

The proposal that best meets Nasittuq's specified needs, and **best demonstrates** this, will be the winner. Before you start writing, there are two things you should determine - the audience and the message.

Proposals are generally evaluated by staff of the issuing department who will be actively involved in the subsequent contract.

The second thing of importance is the message: what exactly is Nasittuq looking for? Your proposal should not just describe what you would do if successful, it must be able to convince Nasittuq that you understand the problem and its objectives will be achieved by entering into a contract with you.

An example might be a Request for Proposal for provision of POL Tank Cleaning. The Request for Proposal may say that Nasittuq is concerned with environmental spills and its adverse affect on the Arctic. Instead of just providing a general statement to safeguarding the environment, you might want to add information about the specific certification your staff has received, describe spill prevention and response plans, and provide a detailed listing of emergency response kits.

Please note that with our examples we are not intending to provide sample wording. You are in the best position to decide what should actually go into your proposal.

### Where do I start?

Read all the instructions and explanations. Ensure that you have read all of the information in the Request for Proposal, and you understand Nasittuq's concerns.

The evaluation criteria are the keys to your success. They show you how proposals are going to be evaluated so you can propose an appropriate solution.

First, whichever proposal you submit, it must meet all the mandatory criteria. Then the order of importance of the desirable criteria, and their relative weightings, will determine the content of your response.

## Format

**What format should my proposal take?**

Many Requests for Proposal (RFP) will include a suggested format, such as the one described below. If so, the suggested format and sequence should be followed to ensure your proposal receives full consideration. If no format is suggested in the RFP, the following would probably work for most proposals:

- a) Title Page, showing Request for Proposal number, bidder's name and address, closing date and time, bidder's telephone and fax numbers, e-mail address and the name of a contact person.
- b) One page letter of introduction, signed by an authorised officer.
- c) Table of contents including page numbers.
- d) A short one or two page summary of the key features of the proposal.
- e) The body of the proposal.
- f) Price or pricing formulae.
- g) Any additional information, brochures, etc. (May take the form of appendices.)

## Partners

**Can I sub-contract? How should this be addressed in the proposal?**

The Request for Proposal usually asks you to identify all sub-contractors in your proposal and state that you are willing to take responsibility for work performed by the sub-contractor(s). If you win the contract and later want to change one of the sub-contractors you will have to get approval from Nasittuq to do so.

**Can we get together with another company to submit a joint proposal?**

Yes, as long as the proposal makes it clear that one of you is going to take overall responsibility for the work done and as long as there is a legal entity with whom Nasittuq can enter into a contract.

## Résumés

**Should I include résumés?**

Sometimes the Request for Proposal will specifically request résumés but, even if it doesn't mention them, if the experience and skills of the project team are being evaluated, it is usually a good idea to include them.

**Should résumés be customized for each proposal?**

Yes, to the extent practical. It is up to you to decide how much time and effort to put into proposal preparation, however, ideally résumés will be in the same typeface as the rest of the proposal and will highlight skills and experience relevant to the project.

## Level of detail

**I've done work for Nasittuq before, do I have to describe my company's experience in detail, the way I would to a new client?**

Yes, you do. Each proposal must stand alone and will be assessed on its merits. To ensure fairness to all, information not contained in the proposal will not be considered during evaluation unless Nasittuq grants approval for referencing boilerplate material submitted under a previous RFP.

**How much detail should I include in my proposal?**

Evaluation of proposals is not a matter of checking boxes to indicate that a criterion has been addressed or not. Therefore to address a topic by saying "Yes, I will do this" is insufficient. Nasittuq wants to know how you will do it. The preferred method is to **avoid** simply paraphrasing Nasittuq's requirement.

## Evaluation criteria

**What are the mandatory criteria versus desirable criteria?**

Mandatory criteria describe the features your proposal must have, or elements it must contain, in order to receive further evaluation. Nasittuq's determination of whether or not you have met each criterion is by a simple "yes" or "no".

Desirable criteria represent those features Nasittuq would like to see in your proposal. Your score in this section indicates how far your proposal goes towards providing what Nasittuq is looking for.

**Are evaluation criteria other than those identified in the Request for Proposal used?**

No. The evaluation committee only evaluates your proposal in accordance with the criteria and weightings provided. However, the Request for Proposal will not usually show a detailed breakdown of how Nasittuq intends to award points for each of the criteria.

## Price

**Do I have to worry about submitting my best price now, or will prices be negotiated later with the winner?**

Because price is being evaluated along with all the other aspects of your proposal, you should put forward your best price now in an effort to win the business. Although Nasittuq sometimes has to negotiate details with the winner, its preference is for a proposal that meets all the requirements without need for further negotiation.

## Expenses

**Proposal preparation is costly; can I be reimbursed for my expenses?**

No. While we understand that preparing a proposal can be expensive, we believe the Request for Proposal to be the most fair and effective way to solicit ideas and give companies the opportunity to compete for our business. We make every effort to eliminate unnecessary expense to proponents but we are not able to pay for the proposals.

## Covering letter

**What should my covering letter say?**

It should very briefly introduce your company and highlight the most convincing features of the proposal. The covering letter should be signed by the person authorized to sign on behalf of the bidder. It should state that you are agreeing to be bound by statements made in the proposal.

The covering letter should also explain in simple terms what you are proposing. When an executive summary is warranted, it should contain all the basic elements of your proposal so that anyone not on the evaluation team would be able to read the summary and understand exactly what you are proposing. The summary should be readily understood by the layperson. It would not contain technical details except to the extent these are essential to an understanding of the proposal.

## Timeframe

**How can I prepare a schedule with accurate timelines when so much could depend on decisions Nasittuq makes prior to or as the project unfolds?**

Perhaps your schedule can make certain assumptions and highlight the various decision points. A separate explanation could identify the assumptions and explain how different decisions might affect the schedule. However, if Nasittuq has told you when it wants the work done, make sure you clearly illustrate that your solution meets Nasittuq's deadlines.

Additionally, your proposal should clearly identify any long lead time delivery items or services which could affect the requested start or end of the project.

## To avoid

**Is there anything I should specifically avoid doing or saying?**

- Avoid underestimating the evaluators. People evaluating the proposals are knowledgeable in their fields. Proposals that contain lots of glitz but little substance will not score well.
- Don't take this opportunity to point out flaws in the existing system unless it is necessary to do so in some measure in order to describe the benefits of your proposal. Proposals should be upbeat and positive and should be suggesting solutions.
- Do not impose conditions on Nasittuq. If you make it too difficult for Nasittuq to accept your proposal, you can be reasonably sure the proposal won't be accepted.

## Checklist

Can you provide a proposal checklist?

The following checklist could be used as a general guideline when responding to a request for proposal:

- Everyone involved in putting together the proposal has read and understood the requirements.
- The proposal addresses everything asked for.
- The proposal meets all the mandatory requirements.
- The appropriate number of copies of the proposal have been made.
- The proposal clearly identifies the bidder, the project, and the Request for Proposal number.
- The bidder's name and the Request for Proposal number appear on the proposal envelope.
- Proposal will definitely be at the closing location before the closing time.
- The covering letter has been signed and attached.
- The technical and price proposal has been submitted as separate documents.

# Proposal presentation and submission

## Appearance

**Does it matter how my proposal looks?**

There may not be any points allocated to the appearance of proposals, but first impressions count. You want Nasittuq to believe that your company is professional and organized, and your proposal should reflect this. It shouldn't be necessary to go to a lot of expense, but care should certainly go into presentation. Here are some examples or suggestions.

- Use a binding method that works, even if it's only a staple. The pages shouldn't fall out when the evaluation committee reads your proposal.
- Use short paragraphs and leave white space on each page.
- As much material as possible should look as if it was created specifically for this proposal. Attachments should all be pertinent to the proposal. Keep in mind that too much material can be off-putting to evaluators and can even detract from the parts you want them to focus on.
- Related topics should be kept together and statements should not be repeated in the proposal.
- Avoid cross-references to the extent possible, as it can be hard for evaluators to evaluate the proposal if they have to frequently jump between sections to get the full picture.
- If you choose to use colour to highlight, use it sparingly for greater impact. Any photographs used to illustrate a point should be clear and attractive and not too busy.
- Section headings usually work best if they are the same size as the text or only slightly larger, and it's often best to stick to one typeface throughout the proposal, varying only by using bold face or underline or other formatting. Avoid excessive use of capital letters.
- Always number the pages, preferably with one numbering series throughout the document.

**How much emphasis should be put on grammar, spelling, etc?**

Your proposal should be easy to read and to understand. Use plain language and write in short, clear sentences. You want to make sure the evaluation team gets the right message. Errors can be distracting. Although you are not writing a novel and are not being given marks for creative writing, your spelling and grammar should be accurate.

**Should I send in my proposal on a disk or in hard copy?**

Unless the Request for Proposal states otherwise, send a printed document, with the requested number of copies. Sometimes Nasittuq will request the proposal, or a portion of the proposal, to be submitted on a disk, therefore you should read the Request for Proposal carefully for instruction.

**How long should the proposal be?**

Only as long as it takes to provide the information.

## **Number of copies**

The reason for the large number of copies (often three or four) is that usually a team of people will be evaluating proposals and in order to give your proposal fair consideration these team members will each need a copy. Although it is a lot to ask of you, Nasittuq has determined that this is the only fair way to ensure that your proposal, looking the way you intended it to look, is evaluated by each team member.

## **Sending it in**

**Can I send in my proposal by e-mail or fax?**

Electronic transmission of the proposal is not usually permitted.

**How important are the noted closing date and time?**

Absolutely crucial. Proposals received after the closing time will not be evaluated.

# Evaluation of proposals

## The steps

### How are proposals evaluated?

After the closing time, members of the evaluation teams review the proposals. The teams typically represent the Technical and Financial Viability/Pricing areas. Each team is responsible for evaluating the proposals within their respective areas. The first thing the teams do is make sure each proposal has met all of the mandatory criteria. Those not meeting all the mandatory requirements are put aside and will receive no further consideration.

Those proposals meeting the mandatory criteria are assessed and given points to indicate how the proposal performs against each of the mandatory and desirable criteria. A scoring sheet is usually used.

After proposals have been evaluated against the mandatory and desirable criteria, a lead bidder(s) may be identified. Short-listed bidders may be asked to provide clarification prior to the final selection. The selection of the contractor is usually made on the basis of the best overall value giving consideration to the evaluation criteria and proposal price.

Once a winner is selected and negotiations are finalized, all bidders are notified.

### What is the evaluation committee looking for?

The committee will score your proposal against the evaluation criteria shown in the Request for Proposal. Usually the Request for Proposal shows broad headings (for example: Management & Technical - 90 points and Financial Viability - 10 points). These headings may be further broken down into sub-criteria for assignment of points, but the sub-criteria will only enlarge upon the already-provided criteria. The only criteria the committee can evaluate are those identified in the Request for Proposal.

## Consideration

### How do I know my proposal will receive full consideration?

Make it easy to read and provide all the requested information. All proposals that meet all mandatory criteria will be evaluated in full.

# Information Available

## Feedback

**How soon will I find out whether or not I've won?**

Whether you have won or not you will usually be notified of the outcome within a week of the decision, providing Nasittuq has all the necessary approvals to proceed.

**Can I get feedback afterwards to find out how I can do better next time?**

Yes. Once the decision has been announced you can request information in the form of a "debriefing", conducted either through a meeting or by means of a telephone conversation with one or more members of the evaluation team. Sometimes the debriefing can take place immediately, other times Nasittuq will ask you to wait until the contract is signed.

**What's the point of attending the debriefing?**

The debriefing is most valuable when you look at it as an opportunity to improve your ability to compete on the next Request for Proposal.

## In closing . . .

**T**hank you for your interest in submitting a proposal. We trust the information contained in here will be of value and we wish you success with future proposals. Should anything still be unclear it would probably be best to address questions about the specific Request for Proposal directly to the contact person identified in the Request for Proposal.

We would be very interested in hearing whether or not you found this guide helpful. Please address any questions, comments or suggestions to [marcel.boudreau@nasittuq.com](mailto:marcel.boudreau@nasittuq.com) or to the Nasittuq Contracts Department at the following address:

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