

Choice Partners is a division of **Harris County Department of Education** (HCDE), a political subdivision (governmental entity) of the state of Texas.

THE CHOICE PARTNERS PROCUREMENT PROCESS*

1. **Determine the Need for a Service and/or Product**

The need for new products and/or services is identified through innovative thinking and communication with members and potential vendor partners. Members' needs are determined in various ways, including formal surveys and informal conversations. Choice Partners staff meet with vendor partners and potential proposers to determine what is state of the art for a product or service, then gather information about company capabilities and assess if there are contract opportunities for products and services that would benefit Choice Partners members. Ideas are discussed at contract managers meetings and viable ideas are followed up with additional investigation and market research.

2. **Develop the Draft RFP Document**

- a. Upon assignment, the contract manager creates a project timeline, predicting a future HCDE Board of Trustees meeting to propose a contract award that allows sufficient time for the development and review process.
- b. Choice Partners staff conducts research to determine proposal specifications. Staff might contact cooperative members and/or potential vendors for background information, knowledge and product specifications. If applicable, past specifications from the library of archived proposal solicitations may be considered.
- c. Choice Partners utilizes standard templates, which are reviewed and updated by HCDE legal counsel to comply with procurement law requirements, as appropriate, specified in Texas Educ. Code § 44, Texas Local Gov't. Codes § 252, 262 and 271, Title 2 CFR 200 and in the case of job order contracts, Texas Government Code § 2269, and Fed'l. Regulations Code 24 CFR 85.36.
- d. Once the RFP is completed, it is reviewed by HCDE senior administrative staff.

3. **Solicitation**

Choice Partners adheres to procurement law for notification and solicitation; e.g. Choice Partners advertises in various publications for two successive weeks: *The Houston Chronicle*, *LA Informacion (Minority-focused publication)*, *Forward Times Minority-focused publication*, and *USA Today* (or a similar national publication), in addition to a list of twenty-six organizations in twenty-five states that manage and facilitate HUB/MWBE programs, as required by Texas Education Code § 44. The solicitation is posted at www.choicepartners.org, www.hcde-texas.org, www.bidcrawl.com and, if applicable, the electronic bidding system, Ionwave (www.ionwave.com).

Providing the RFP Document: Interested companies can access Choice Partners RFP solicitation documents by registering as a supplier at the website database under the appropriate product/service category then either downloading the documents, submitting a written request for hardcopy via email or letter or by calling 1-877-696-2122 to request the solicitation document from Choice Partners. Solicitations are issued and submitted electronically in the eBid system.

Proposer Questions: Questions are submitted online through the Choice Partners website. The contract manager for the RFP, assisted by other staff, will monitor the website and will answer questions within 24 hours of receipt and post the answers on-line, so that all potential proposers have the same access to the Q&As. Questions are not answered by phone or email.

Addenda: If there are modifications to the RFP solicitation, an addendum will be issued. Addenda are sent to all potential proposers who have already registered and downloaded a copy of the RFP solicitation. Notification of addenda will be posted to the Choice Partners website: www.choicepartners.org.

Pre-proposal Conference: A pre-proposal conference will be scheduled for questions to be asked.

4. **Proposer Responses**

The date, time and place for responses to solicitations are specified in the proposal document, the solicitation advertisements and the Choice Partners website. Responses will require an online response.

A proposal opening will be held at a specified time and virtually as written in the document. Proposers who submit a proper proposal will be publicly announced and recorded by Choice Partners staff at the proposal opening. Further information will not be disclosed nor will public review of the responses be allowed at this time. Once the contract has been awarded at a public meeting by the HCDE Board of Trustees, the document becomes subject to public open records law, as applicable.

5. **Evaluate Proposer Responses**

- a. Submissions deemed responsive according to time stamps and being a complete and acceptable response, will be moved forward to the next step in the process. Non-responsive submissions are rejected and not considered for an award.
- b. An evaluation team is formed; members evaluate/score each response according to the published evaluation criteria in the proposal document. Additionally, at this step, submissions may be deemed responsive or non-responsive. Submissions deemed responsive will be moved forward to the next step in the process. Non-responsive submissions are rejected and not considered for an award.

b-1. Evaluation Criteria

The evaluation criteria meets or exceeds the requirements of the procurement laws specified in number 2 above, and may include some or all of the following, as specified in the proposal document:

- purchase price;
 - experience and reputation of the vendor and of the vendor's products/services;
 - quality of the vendor's products/services;
 - extent to which the goods or services meet the member's needs;
 - vendor's past relationship with Choice Partners and/or cooperative members;
 - impact on the ability of the member to comply with laws and rules relating to historically underutilized businesses (HUB/MWBE/SBE);
 - total long-term cost to the member to acquire the vendor's products or services;
 - whether the vendor or the vendor's ultimate parent company or majority owner: (a) has its principal place of business in Texas; or (b) employs at least 500 persons in Texas (applies to contracts for goods and services, other those related to telecommunications and information services, building construction and maintenance, or instructional materials);
 - proposer's marketing plan;
 - any other relevant factors specifically listed in the requests for proposal.
- c. During the evaluation process, negotiations and/or discussions may be held with proposers, and a final and best offer is submitted upon request, if necessary.
 - d. The Choice Partners staff tabulates the scores of the qualified responses.
 - e. The evaluation committee makes contract award recommendations.

6. **Contract Awards**

Contracts are solely awarded by the HCDE Board of Trustees at a public meeting. All awarded proposers will be notified via an award letter. More than one vendor may receive an award letter ('multiple awards'). An announcement is made to Choice Partners members and vendor partners via multiple methods, including but not limited to, a press release posted on the Choice Partners website and in *The Leader's Choice* monthly e-newsletter.

Contracts may be awarded for a one- or two-year initial award, with subsequent annual renewals for a total contract term not to exceed five years. Each awarded vendor must submit required documentation each year (after the term of the initial award period) and be in good standing with Choice Partners and our members to be offered the annual renewal.

7. **Public Review of Choice Partners RFPs Issued and/or Contracts Awarded**

Choice Partners provides contracts and supporting documentation on the Choice Partners website in the 'Due Diligence' section on the contracts page for each awarded vendor. Choice Partners staff assists members as needed to review those documents.

*HCDE awarded contracts may be used by other governmental agencies; in Texas, an interlocal agreement (ILA) is required to be executed, as specified in Government Code 791. Outside of Texas, members will register with Choice Partners, and subsequently follow the local state statutes and guidelines.