

HOW TO BID YOUR COLLEGE FOOD SERVICE – CASH/NON-BOARD PLAN

With over 40 years of food service contract experience, Consolidated Management Company has experienced many food service bids and requests for bids/proposals. Following is some of what we have learned that can make your bid process easier.

Taking your food service out to bid need not be difficult or worrisome. As you know, your food service impacts many people in your organization. Therefore, you want to have enough information to make the right decision for you and your organization. To make taking your food service out to bid easier consider the following:

- Why are you bidding your food service? The better you understand why you are contemplating a change the easier it will be for you to be successful in finding the right food service vendor.
- Be clear about your desired outcome. When you know what you want it will be easier to insure your Request for Proposal (RFP) addresses issues that let the vendors know your needs and thus properly present a proposal that address these.
- The most important thing you can do is present as many facts as possible. The more facts about your college food service the more accurate a bid you will receive and the less chance for disappointment in your decision. Things to share that will impact your price and service include:
 - a) Hours of service
 - b) Annual calendar showing dates food service is open, dates closed (holidays, weekends, vacation shutdowns, etc.), days when something special is happening that could impact food service (i.e. an annual employee pot luck lunch, open limited hours before a holiday)
 - c) Include summer food service expectations including dates of service, hours expect to have food service open, and number of students and faculty on campus.
 - d) If your college has sports teams that require food services, be specific about needs.
 - e) What is your policy for on-campus employee parking?
 - f) Do you expect donations for anything? i.e. President's office, student groups, free student welcome back meals, staff holiday meals. Be specific regarding expectations.
 - g) How many students are on campus during the times the food service is open. It doesn't help your bid if you include students who are usually online only students.
 - h) Anything that is special to the college?
 - i) Who repairs the equipment – you or the vendor? (normally you will)
 - j) Who pays for utilities? – (usually your college will but if there is some other arrangement be clear about it.)
 - k) Who provides pest control, trash removal, local phone service, internet connection?
 - l) Do you want disposable plates, glasses, etc. or reusable (china or plastic)?
 - m) Who will buy replacements of lost or broken china, etc. if appropriate, you or the vendor?
- Be clear regarding food service insurance needs. Your insurance agent can help.
- What are the catering expectations of your food service? If you have the amount of dollars you historically spend it will help to share that information. If catering is after hours – such as weekends or non-class days the vendor will need to know. If you have

certain expectations (linen table covers, drop off and leave, provide service attendant) share these. Be sure to ask for a sample catering guide with portion sizes and prices. Share catering locations across campus.

- Is vending part of this RFP? If so be sure to state the number of machines and type (soda, coffee, snacks). Where are machines located around the campus? Be sure to request prices for each type item in the machines.
- Ask for menus with portion sizes and prices. The more specifics (for example items you want on the menu, portion sizes) you share the easier it will be to compare vendors but the less creativity you will receive in your bid and operation. If you have expectations be clear about them. For example if you want a salad bar, say so.
- Be clear about how often menu prices can be changed and what the process will be or ask the vendors how they will handle.
- Discuss complaint resolution. If you have an expectation, state it. If you want to know how the vendor will handle complaints ask for this in your RFP.
- Do you expect your students to be able to pay with a credit or debit card? If so put this expectation in your RFP.
- If you expect your food service workers to be in uniform state so.
- Be sure to be clear that you reserve the right to choose or remove any vendor from the process as you want. You don't want this to be purely a price bid. Remember the price of oats depends on which end of the horse you get them from!
- If you have a clear start date for the winner of this bid share that date. Also state how long the contract will be. One to five years is standard.
- Ask for the vendor's plan to start your food service operation so you know your vendor

can handle your business with as little disruption as possible.

- Joint employer laws are changing so be clear you will not be a joint employer.
- If your food service workers are members of a union or other bargaining unit share this information. Be prepared to share a copy of your union contract.
- If you have expectations about employees of the food service (hourly pay, keeping certain employees working at your account, benefits) be sure to share them.
- Changing a food service director is disruptive. Consider a statement that the food service director cannot be changed more than once a year (or whatever you are comfortable with while being fair with the individual who may want advancement).
- Be clear about when you want the bids due. State a location, date, and time until they will be accepted.
- State how many copies of the proposals you want, if you want paper or electronic copies (or both) and if you want them delivered in a sealed package with certain wording on the outside of the package (i.e. Food Service Proposal due August 1, 2016.)
- There is no problem if you want to let a vendor hand deliver a proposal and walk you through it. Be clear so all vendors have the same opportunity.
- If there will be a formal bid opening with commissions or other information read, state so. Many colleges do not have formal openings.
- It is helpful to share a timeline of steps to get you to your decision so you don't have to field a lot of questions. For example: RFP issued February 1, tour of facility February 15, questions due by February 20, answers posted on line or emailed by February 22, proposals due March 10, top three choices asked back for a presentation by March 20, decision announced April 1, and start July 1.

Please note, not all these steps are necessary.

- Most vendors will have questions. Be clear on how you want these handled. Many organizations require questions be submitted in writing (email) with answers provided to all vendors.
- Many vendors will want to physically see your kitchen, serving area, and dining room. The easiest way for you is to state in your RFP that there is a survey of the facilities on a certain date and time. Some organizations prefer the different vendors ask for an individual time for the survey. Either is fine, it depends on you!
- If you expect the vendor to sign your contract share a sample in the RFP. If you want to use the vendor's contact you can ask for a draft in the bid. Some do this and some wait until the vendor is chosen.
- If you know historic annual sales levels for three years it is helpful but not mandatory that you share these. Remember the more information you share the better your bids will be and the fewer problems you will have after the contract starts. If something has changed, such as the student population, be sure to share this.
- Be sure to ask for references including contact names, phone numbers, and emails.
- Occasionally a vendor will ask for an extension to the due date for delivering their proposal. You are under no obligation to grant an extension, but if you do be sure to share the new due date with all vendors.

Once proposals are delivered you will have to review each. You may have a food service selection committee. If so be sure each person receives a copy

of the proposal. Be prepared for a proposal to be a thick book. Some break the proposals into sections with each committee member being assigned a section of the proposal to study and report back to the group. However you want to handle this is up to you.

After proposals are studied, weed out those that don't meet your expectations. Check references. Then you are ready to either make a decision or to ask for your top two or three choices to come back and make a presentation. If you want a presentation be clear on expectations. Do you want sample food to taste? Do you want a presentation discussing certain areas important to you or that are not clear in the proposal? Be sure to leave time for the vendor to answer questions.

Please note: Many college clients think their food service is a gold mine. At the largest campuses this may be true depending on the number of food service venues, hours of service, equipment, menu prices, etc. For most small colleges, food service vendors struggle to make it financially. It is fair to ask for a commission (rebate) on your food service, but in many instances this is not realistic. Be open minded. Let the bidders make offers rather than dictate how much you want. If your food service is small or your hours of service and different venues are many, be prepared to be asked for a subsidy. If you are willing to pay a subsidy, state so and ask how much is required.

Once you make your decision you may want to wait until your contract is signed or at least negotiated before announcing the winner to the other vendors. Once you are sure you have a contract or deal made, it is appropriate to thank the other vendors for their time and interest.