

HOW TO BID YOUR BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY FOOD SERVICE

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 business or industry 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 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, bring your child to work day, etc.)
 - c) How many people are in the building during the times the food service is open. It doesn't help your bid if you include employees who are usually out of the building during the meal times – such as outside sales people.
 - d) Anything that is special to the company or out of the ordinary such as 5¢ cups of coffee or fried chicken every Thursday.
 - e) Who repairs the equipment – you or the vendor? (normally you will)
 - f) Who pays for utilities? – (usually your organization will but if there is some other arrangement be clear about it.)
 - g) Who provides pest control, trash removal, local phone service, internet connection?
 - h) Do you want disposable plates, glasses, etc. or reusable (china or plastic)?
 - i) 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 if your business or industry is normally closed on weekends, 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.
- 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 in relation to people's work stations? Be sure to request prices for each type item in the machines.

- Ask for sample 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.
- 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 employees 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.
- 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 businesses 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 December 1, tour of facility December 10, questions due by December 12, answers posted on line or emailed by December 14, proposals due December 19, top three choices asked back for a presentation by January 10, decision announced January 20, and start February 25. 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 population of the plant is down 15%, be sure to share this.
- Be sure to ask for references including contact names, phones, 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.

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.