



## HOW TO BID YOUR JAIL INMATE FOOD SERVICE

With over 40 years of food service contract experience, Consolidated Correctional Foodservice 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 jail 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) Meal Times
  - b) How many inmates do you average each meal and the total number of meals you served each year for the last 3 years?
  - c) Do you want your staff to eat inmate meals? If so, what is the average number of staff meals each day?
  - d) Do you want your staff eating from a separate menu?
  - e) Who pays for utilities? – (usually your organization will but if there is some other arrangement be clear about it.)
  - f) Who provides pest control, trash removal, local phone service, internet connection?
  - g) Do you house juveniles? If so, how many on average and what do you require meal wise?
  - h) Do you permit inmate workers? If so, what can they do? i.e. Cook, dish meals, wash dishes, and mop floors. How many inmates on average are available to work in food service?
  - i) What are your calorie requirements? Are these minimum per day, or average per week?
  - j) Do you prefer three hot meals per day, two hot and one cold, or other?
  - k) If cold meal is permitted, can your staff pick up prepackaged/plated meals for the cold or does a food service staff person need to be present?
  - l) Who delivers trayed meals to pods? How long after serving will dirty trays be returned?
  - m) Can the kitchen, cooler, and storage areas be secured at night or when the food service staff is not present?
  - n) What is your attitude towards special diets and religious meals?
  - o) Do you want special holiday meals? If so, which holidays? Ask for sample menus for these meals.
- Be clear regarding food service insurance needs. Your insurance agent can help.
- Ask for sample menus with portion sizes and nutritional breakdown including calories. If you have menu expectations be clear about them. For example do you require ground beef or will ground chicken/turkey be



acceptable? Do you require milk in cartons or will bulk dispensers work?

- Be clear about how often meal rates can be changed and what the process will be. Normally choosing the Consumer Price Index is a good tool to determine annual increases.
- 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.
- If you expect your food service workers to be in uniform state so.
- 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. Share length of contract.
- 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 meal rate or other information read, state so. Many jails 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, 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.

- 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 and/or answer questions. If you want a presentation be clear on expectations. 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.