How to Respond to Pre-Award Notices: Knowing the Details Will Have an Impact

Knowing the difference between a Request For Information (RFI), a Sources Sought Synopsis (SSS), a Request For Quotes (RFQ) and a Request For Proposal (RFP) can move your small business from simply trying to get a contract, to providing a response that meets the requirements outlined by the Government. The U.S. General Services Administration and its Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU), as members of the acquisition community, can help small businesses navigate the challenges and the opportunities of acquiring Federal contracts.

This information sheet explains the differences between RFIs, SSSs, RFQs and RFPs. It also provides tips and best practices for responding to RFIs, SSSs, RFQs, and RFPs and outlines resources to help you develop your best response. As the names suggests, they're all requests but they're all requests for different things. The table below helps to break each request down and what's needed for each.

Federal RFIs, SSSs, RFQs, and RFPs follow the Federal Acquisition Regulations (FAR), which is the regulatory source for Federal Government contracting.

- Review the FAR by visiting: https://go.usa.gov/xFRjS.

- Definitions for terms related to Federal Government contracting can be found in FAR Part 2: https://go.usa.gov/xFRDx

What Are the Differences between Pre-Award Notices and Solicitations?

	Request for Information (RFI)	Sources Sought Synopsis (Notice)	Request for Quote (RFQ)	Request for Proposal (RFP)
FAR Reference:	See **FAR Part 10** (Market Research).	See **FAR Part 10** (Market Research)	See **FAR Part 13** (Simplified Acquisition Procedures), **FAR Part 8** (Schedules). Not equal to an RFP	See **FAR Part 15** (Negotiations). Not equal to an RFQ.
Purpose:	A market research tool used for forecasted requirements. Posted early in the acquisition process, **before** defining a requirement for procurement.	A market research tool primarily used to identify small businesses capable of performing/providing the requirement. Posted early in the acquisition process, **after** defining a requirement for procurement.	A document submitted to request a quote for supplies/ services for simplified acquisitions or from vendors with contracts in the GSA Schedules program. Posted after an acquisition strategy has been determined as a result of market research.	A formal solicitation for supplies/services with a value expected to exceed the Simplified Acquisition Threshold. Posted after an acquisition strategy has been determined as a result of market research.
Used to:	Used to help the Government plan and understand market potential, price, delivery, industry capabilities, etc. This method is used when the Government needs insight into the market to develop the requirement/acquisition strategy.	Used to gain knowledge of potential contractors regarding a specific requirement and to determine if there is a reasonable expectation of obtaining two or more offers from small business concerns.	Used to communicate Government requirements to prospective contractors to obtain quotes.	Used to communicate Government requirements to prospective contractors and to solicit proposals.
Restrictions:	While specific details may also be requested, it's generally a written request for ideas/information.	Specific details are requested by the contacting agency to identify potential contractors and determine market capacity consistent with the scope and scale of the requirement.	Requires strict adherence to the terms and conditions stipulated in the solicitation.	Requires strict adherence to the provisions and anticipated terms/ conditions stipulated in the solicitation that will be negotiated and applied to the resulting contract.

*Definitions related to Federal Government contracting can be found in FAR Part 2

Understand the importance and why you should respond!

▪ **Request for Information (RFI) and Sources Sought Synopsis -**

- RFI and Sources Sought Synopsis are commonly used market research tools in the acquisition process, but are used for different purposes. RFI's and Sources Sought Synopsis' are considered by GSA and SBA as a best practice and an efficient method of canvassing the vendor community for feedback and potential small business sources.

- Your response can influence potential small business participation. You can also position yourself as an interested supplier or subject matter expert (SME) when you provide your input into the acquisition.

- Your response can help the agency learn if the requirement and the evaluation process is realistic. If capable small businesses do not respond, small businesses may lose a potential set-aside. If a set-aside is not used these opportunities could potentially become full and open opportunities, which means you will compete against all small and large businesses.

- Responding to deadlines is vital for interested small businesses. Contacting the Government to determine set-aside

- status for a procurement after the submission deadline is too late.

  ▪ Need more information on small business set-asides?
    Visit https://www.gsa.gov/setasides

- For more information on Sources Sought Synopsis, see the Procurement Technical Assistance Center (PTAC) link, below. https://www.aptac-us.org/sources-sought/.

- We strongly encourage you to respond to the RFI and Sources Sought Synopsis if you are interested in the opportunity. Remember, this is the time for you to ask any questions regarding the potential requirement.

- **Request for Quote (RFQ) -**

  - An RFQ is a solicitation issued for organizations to submit quotes for the chance to fulfill certain tasks or projects.

  - RFQs are used for low-dollar procurements providing easy access for small businesses. It's a great way for companies to become acquainted with Government contracting processes and regulations.

  - RFQ responses provide information that helps Federal buyers fulfill commercial, off-the-shelf (COTS) requirements.

  - Quotes received by the Government aren't considered a binding contract agreement. The contract is established when the contractor accepts the Government's subsequent offer to work by:

    1. Signing the quote or

    2. Performing the work/supplying materials, after receipt of the quote

Learn more about RFQs at https://go.usa.gov/xFRD6.

- **Request for Proposal (RFP) -**

  - An RFP is a solicitation issued that describes what the customer (agency) is interested in buying and explains how offerors/vendos should prepare and submit a proposal in response to the Government's requirement. The Uniform Contract Format (UCF) is often used to break the solicitation into sections (see FAR Part 15.204-1, Uniform contract format at https://go.usa.gov/xFRWC).

  - Depending on the acquisition strategy, solicitations may refer to specific FAR parts and clauses (e.g.; Part 13 applies to Simplified Acquisition Procedures), so you have to know the separate sections and be willing to research. While practice makes perfect, quantity does not mean quality. You have to not only decide if proposal preparation is worth your time and effort, you also must respond to exactly what the solicitation requests.

Find more contract proposal resources with the Procurement Technical Assistance Centers at https://go.usa.gov/xFEgm.

For more information on FAR references and clauses see the searchable FAR located at Acquisition.gov

References and Resources:
- GSA OSDBU: https://www.gsa.gov/osdbu

- Find your local PTAC counselor, who can explain RFIs, SSSs, RFQs, and RFPs. They'll give you more advice for free: https://go.usa.gov/xFEgm.

- The Defense Acquisition University ACQuipedia has articles on: Responding to Pre-Award Inquiries, Responsibility Determinations, Past Performance, Construction Contracting and Commercial Contracting. Search the ACQuipedia at https://www.dau.edu/acquipedia/.

Need more help?

Visit us at: **https://www.gsa.gov/osdbu**

Register for future OSDBU training and events at: **https://www.gsa.gov/osdbuevents**

Contact your local Small Business Specialist: **https://www.gsa.gov/smallbizsupport**

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Access more resources at: **https://interact.gsa.gov/groups/small-business-solutions**