

COMPETITIVE BIDDING AND PROPOSAL RESPONSIVENESS

The purpose of competitive bidding is to secure public objectives in the most effective manner and avoid the possibilities of graft, fraud, collusion, etc. Competitive bidding is designed to benefit the public body (the State, in the present context), and is not for the benefit of the bidders. It is administered to accomplish its purposes with sole reference to the public interest. It is based upon full and free bidding to satisfy State specifications, and acceptance by the State of the most effective solution to the State's requirements, as determined by the evaluation criteria contained in the RFP.

Competitive bidding is not defined in any single statute but is more in the nature of a compendium of numerous court decisions. From such court decisions, the following rules have evolved, among others:

- 1) Request for Proposals must provide a basis for full and fair competitive bidding among bidders on a common standard, free of restrictions tending to stifle competition.
- 2) The State may modify the IFB/RFP, prior to the date fixed for Contract Award, by issuance of an addendum to all parties who are bidders.
- 3) To have a valid bid, the bid must respond and conform to the invitation, including all the documents which are incorporated therein. A bid which does not literally comply may be rejected.
- 4) For a variance between the request for bids and the bid to be such as to preclude acceptance (the bid must be rejected), the variance or deviation must be a material one.
- 5) State agencies usually have the express or implied right to reject any and all bids in the best interests of the State. Bids cannot, however, be selectively rejected without cause.
- 6) Bids cannot be changed after the time designated for receipt and opening thereof. Other than allowed by law, no negotiation as to the scope of the work, amount to be paid, or contractual terms is permitted. However, this does not preclude the State from clarifying the bidder's intent by asking questions and considering answers.
- 7) A competitive bid, once opened and declared, is in the nature of an irrevocable option and a contract right of which the public agency cannot be deprived without its consent, unless the requirements for rescission are present. All bids become public documents.
- 8) Bids cannot be accepted "in part," unless the invitation specifically permits such an award.
- 9) Contracts entered into through the competitive bidding process cannot later be amended, unless the Invitation for Bids includes a provision, to be incorporated in the contract awarded, providing for such amendment.

Since competitive procurement became the required method for securing certain IT goods or services, the State has received a number of bids which were deemed to be nonresponsive to the Invitation for Bids or which could not be considered as valid bids within the competitive bidding procedures. Nonresponsive bids or bids which contain qualifications must be rejected. Many of the causes for rejection arise from either an incomplete understanding of the competitive bidding process or administrative oversight on the part of the bidders. The following examples are illustrative of more common causes for rejection of bids. These examples are listed to assist potential bidders in submission of responsive bids.

1. A bid stated, "The prices stated within are for your information only and are subject to change."
2. A bid stated, "This proposal shall expire thirty (30) days from this date unless extended in writing by the ____ Company." (In this instance award was scheduled to be approximately 45 days after bid submittal date.)
3. A bid for lease of equipment contained lease plans of a duration shorter than that which had been requested in the IFB/RFP.
4. A personal services contract stated, "_____, in its judgment, believes that the schedules set by the State are extremely optimistic and probably unobtainable. Nevertheless, _____ will exercise its best efforts..."
5. A bid stated, "This proposal is not intended to be of a contractual nature."
6. A bid contained the notation "prices are subject to change without notice."
7. A bid was received for the purchase of equipment with unacceptable modifications to the Purchase Contract.
8. A bid for lease of equipment contained lease plans of a duration longer than that which had been requested in the IFB/RFP with no provision for earlier termination of the contract.
9. A bid for lease of equipment stated, "...this proposal is preliminary only and the order, when issued, shall constitute the only legally binding commitment of the parties."
10. A bid was delivered to the wrong office.
11. A bid was delivered after the date and time specified in the IFB/RFP.
12. An IFB/RFP required the delivery of a performance bond covering 25 percent of the proposed contract amount. The bid offered a performance bond to cover "x" dollars which was less than the required 25 percent of the proposed contract amount.
13. A bid did not meet contract goal for DVBE participation and did not follow the steps required by the bid to achieve a "good faith effort."
14. A bid appeared to meet contract goal for DVBE participation with the dollars submitted, but the supplier had miscalculated the bid costs. When these corrections were made by the State, the supplier's price had increased and the dollars committed for DVBE participation no longer met goal. The supplier had not followed the steps to achieve a "good faith effort."