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Writing a RIM Request for Proposal

Clearly defining the business need and carefully outlining requirements will allow the records and information management professional to craft an RFP that will result in the best vendor and product solution

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Writing a records and information management (RIM) request for proposal (RFP) can be a significant undertaking that will require resources from many different departments, including those responsible for original documents, records management, support areas such as IT, and key stakeholders with corporate compliance and budget responsibility.

An RFP effort will typically begin when a department identifies a need. For example, the IT department may be assigned to research and implement a records management system (RMS) that will work seamlessly with existing document creation software, as well as with existing paper records. The business requirements that are driving the project may involve compliance with regulations such as the Sarbanes-Oxley Act (SOX) and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), as well as with accounting issues.

Planning should begin with understanding the variables that may exist for the RIM opportunity. These are only a few of the questions that should be asked during the planning stage to help the organization understand what technologies will be required for an RMS and what solutions may be possible.

1. Is there an RMS or electronic document management system (EDMS)? If not, the project, then, is not dependent on any other system, and the new system must handle both existing paper records and electronic files.

2. If there is an existing RMS, what

At the Core

This article

▶ Defines the process for planning an RFP

▶ Outlines the organization and structure of a winning RFP

▶ Details the evaluation process once RFPs result in vendor proposals

▶ Offers suggestions for post-RFP activities

does it manage? Can the data about each record be migrated to a new system? If the new system will be a replacement, why is the current system not effective?

3. If there is an existing EDMS, what documents or content does it manage? Can the index data and documents be migrated to a new system? Does the vendor have a records management component that can be used, or will the project require looking to a third-party RMS that can be integrated with the existing EDMS? Note that there may be several EDMS systems in use in a large corporation, in which case the project is even more complex.

4. Is there an existing records retention schedule and file plan? If not, these should be addressed in parallel with, or prior to, writing an RFP for the RMS, as they are key components of an electronic document and records management system (EDRMS).

5. What types of records will the RMS need to include? Will paper

documents be part of the RMS as well as a diverse number of electronic documents?

Many vendors have combined RM and EDMS capabilities into one system such that RM functions are invoked (e.g., declare, classify) when the document is created or received. Once a record is declared and classified, the system may also automatically assign indexing and metadata to the record based on contextual information.

While it is possible to purchase and implement a standalone RM system, such systems are designed to work with an existing document management system. Therefore, it seems that one cannot consider a records management system without considering a document management system. Writing an RFP for a records management system is actually like writing an RFP for two systems, and each must include sufficient detail for the vendors to provide adequate responses.

Initial Need Identification

After the need for an RMS has been determined, the first step is a preliminary analysis to determine what is involved in providing a solution to the problem or need. This initial study may be a high-level review that lists basic issues, the risks involved in not taking further action, the benefits of solving the problem, and the resources needed to move forward. The outcome of this task is to clarify the need more formally, provide enough information to proceed, suggest alternate means of solving the problem, or recommend that the team stop any further work. The report may also identify the departments to be implemented based on prioritized business issues, risks, and compliance needs, and suggest that any system be implemented in a limited fashion with full rollout over a period of years.

Business Process Analysis

The next step is to perform an analysis of documents and business processes for target departments. This analysis can take many different forms depending on

the project, but generally, the analysis should focus on the documents (e.g., electronic, paper, data) or business content and how they are used to perform the needed business operation. If documents are already being stored as official business records, this should become the basis for understanding the types and volumes of documents being stored.

Documenting the current work process creates a baseline of information that can be used to develop the functional requirements for the RFP. In other words, it is necessary to understand the current process(es), documents, and record types before beginning to envision how an RMS would be used as well as which type of RMS would be appropriate.

The result of the business process analysis is a written report documenting the process. It may include tables of document types and volumes, workflow diagrams, and a collection of physical and electronic documents used in support of the work.

- *Records media:* Does the organization require the ability to handle both electronic and paper records? Some systems do not address paper records while others have only marginally acceptable facilities for paper records.

RFP Organization and Structure

While an RFP can be assembled in many different ways, having a logical organization that vendors can easily follow is one of the keys to success. The following is a suggested outline for the major RFP sections.

> # Writing an RFP is a project by itself and should have a project manager, plan, and schedule.

Requirements Development

An RFP is essentially a list of requirements that defines the needs of the intended system. Requirements define how a system or product operates to fulfill expectations. For example, a RIM system requirement may be to allow for the manual addition of indexing data or to allow a user to classify a record without declaring it a record. Requirements development is the listing of system attributes based on the functional work requirements and needs of the user as well as the corporate needs for compliance with rules and regulations.

Complete requirements for the desired system will vary by organization, but some sample requirements are:

- *Compliance:* With what rules and regulations must the organization be in compliance? Some possibilities are HIPAA, SOX, Securities and Exchange Commission, and Department of Defense.

- *File plan implementation:* Describe and provide a copy of the organization's file plan and records retention schedule. Current vendor offerings have diverse methods for incorporating file plans – ranging from manual input to fully automated.

- *Administration:* What are the organization's requirements for administering the system? What level of RIM and IT technical expertise is available or needed to operate the system?

- *Records declaration:* What are the desired records declaration and classification requirements for the system?

- *Destruction:* How is the system expected to handle destruction of documents?

- *Legal holds:* How does the organization expect the system to implement holds against the records? How are records on hold to be identified?

- *Storage:* Once declared and classified, where are the records held and maintained?

- *Importing documents:* How should the system handle bulk imports of existing electronic documents?

- *Interoperability:* Should the system operate against different document repositories? Is a federated search capability required?

Managing the RFP Process

Writing an RFP is a project by itself and should have a project manager, plan, and schedule. The typical RIM RFP may require additional project resources because it may involve many business units and approvals from many corporate stakeholders. An RFP can take six months or more to complete, and the team will be required to participate at varying levels during that time. The RFP project manager's responsibility includes securing the needed resources to complete the RFP.

3. Introduction and Overview

4. Technical (system requirements)

5. Management (project management requirements)

6. Pricing

7. Appendices

The outline may be modified to fit a particular project. For example, the company may add a section called "Contractual Information and Response" if its contractual requirements are particularly complex, and it wants to ensure that vendors respond directly to such contractual needs. If the company is particularly security-conscious, it may separate the security section from the technical requirements and make it a distinct heading that vendors must address in their proposals.

Cover Letter – This is an important first page, as it introduces the RFP project and provides some of the project's most vital dates. The cover letter may also include anything special about the RFP that vendors should note.

The cover letter reinforces information found in the administrative requirements or other sections of the RFP. Information in the cover letter can help vendors determine quickly what the RFP is about and what the important dates are for planning purposes.

Administrative – The administrative section establishes the rules and requirements for responding to the RFP. It is

important because it establishes how vendors will contact the RFP team, how they should format their proposals, what rules must be adhered to during the RFP competition, and other items that are important to the process.

Introduction and Overview – The introduction is an executive summary that provides vendors with a high-level overview of the business and the technical issues that are driving the RFP. This summary begins with the an overview of the company and then moves into a synopsis of the problems or issues that are the driving force behind the RFP.

Technical Requirements – The technical requirements section is the heart of the RFP and is where vendors should spend the most time initially. This section details the amount and type of work that must be accomplished by a product, service, or person. The technical requirements are the foundation for a vendor's technical proposal, but they also drive other sections such as project management and pricing.

The technical section for a RIM

not subject to misinterpretation by the vendor. Also, recognize that with simple yes/no answers, the vendors have no chance to differentiate themselves and their products in potentially key areas.

Some requirements are better phrased to require a narrative answer. For example, asking if the proposed system has a method for placing records on legal hold will elicit a positive response from all vendors, but the "yes" answer may not provide sufficient detail about how the records are identified, who can place a record on hold, or how holds are released. Determine which requirements need a narrative response from the vendor and phrase them so they must be answered this way. For example, "Describe how you import a file plan." Be aware, however, that some vendors will respond with several pages of boilerplate verbiage instead of a direct, freshly written response.

Management Requirements – This section provides information about how the project will be organized and who will be responsible for specific

7. References
8. Training (description of class and schedule)
9. Documentation (paper manuals, CDs, online)
10. Staffing requirements (Will additional personnel be needed?)

A RIM system can be a complex undertaking requiring major changes for the users. It may also significantly change the RIM department by requiring, for example, extensive user training by a RIM specialist and the addition of a dedicated IT person who will maintain the RMS.

Pricing Requirements – Pricing for a RIM system can be a multi-part matrix of products and services. How does one compare apples to apples when there are oranges and bananas in the mix? The key is to give the vendors clear guidelines for developing their pricing section. This means that vendors are instructed to break down their pricing into component areas such as application development, system software, project management, and maintenance. Depending on

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RFP can be challenging to write because it is essentially describing two systems – the DMS and the RMS. For vendors to understand the needs of an RMS, they first have to understand the documents and content that are being created.

In writing the technical requirements, organizations may develop a list of questions or a matrix of mandatory requirements that the vendor can respond to with a yes/no answer, such as, "Does your system recognize a .tif file format?" When developing lists of requirements as questions, review them to ensure that they are questions that need no further explanation and are

tasks. It may request the following items be proposed by the vendors based on unique project requirements.

1. Project management and implementation plan
2. Project schedule (estimated in the proposal)
3. Site preparation requirements
4. Application development plan
   a. System-level testing
   b. User testing
   c. Acceptance testing
5. System acceptance test plan
6 Maintenance description and schedules

the RFP and its application, it may be good practice to develop a pricing spreadsheet and require vendors to enter their pricing data into it. One key to accurate pricing is to provide the vendor with the number of users and the volumes of documents. Without these two important numbers, vendors will have a hard time sizing the system.

Appendices – The RFP's appendices are the appropriate area to place documentation such as records retention schedule, file plan, lists of document types, document volumes, document samples, workflow diagrams, and any other supporting data referenced in the RFP.

Evaluation Criteria

As part of the RFP development process, and in concert with writing the requirements and specifications, the RFP team is also responsible for developing the proposal evaluation criteria. Proposals must be evaluated in a fair and meaningful manner; otherwise, it will appear that the RFP was "already rigged for a preselected vendor," which is a common

The final step in the evaluation process is to recommend a supplier as the winner.

Post RFP Activities

Once evaluations are finished, several additional steps must be completed to organize and close the RFP phase.

Complete the evaluation report. The report reviews what vendors were consid-

consider during the contract review. RIM professionals will be able to help facilitate the contract negotiations and perhaps avoid a stalemate should a dispute arise.

Start the project. The first step in the project is usually to sit down with the vendor and review the project plan, finalize a start date, and organize the project team.

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belief among vendors.

Proposal evaluation encompasses many different areas.

1. *Basic adherence and compliance with the RFP administrative requirements.* Was the proposal submitted on time? Did the vendor comply with the suggested proposal format? Did the supplier acknowledge and incorporate changes to the RFP as requested? Was the proposal responsive?

2. *Overall understanding of the RFP issues.* Is it evident that the supplier understands the basic issues driving the RFP? Does the supplier's proposal respond to those issues with a logical and understandable solution?

3. *Technical requirements.* Did the supplier respond to each of the technical requirements adequately? Are there exceptions?

4. *Management requirements.* Is a reasonable and acceptable project and implementation plan included? Does the plan demonstrate an understanding of the RFP needs?

5. *Pricing.* Is the pricing reasonable compared to the estimated budget and other proposals submitted? Is the pricing broken into the component parts as requested, or is pricing presented as a single total?

ered, how they were evaluated, and why the winning vendor was selected over other vendors on the short list.

Present the report. This report is delivered to senior management in the business unit, information technology, and purchasing. If needed, or desired, the RFP team may be asked to provide a presentation of the evaluation results. (This report along with the original RFP and winning proposal may fall under SOX guidelines.)

Notify the winning vendor. Assuming that the evaluation report is accepted, notify the winning vendor and schedule a meeting to begin contract negotiations and get the contract signed so that the project can begin. If not previously done, notify the unsuccessful vendors in writing that another company was selected.

Negotiate the contract. While purchasing likely will take over the negotiations, it is advisable for RIM professionals to participate in the final negotiations. Because this purchase is not for a common, off-the-shelf product, there will be some fine points that the purchasing person may not understand or

Points to Remember

An RFP is a document that defines a business problem or need and provides enough information to allow potential vendors to propose a solution. Proposals, by their very nature, are a vendor's interpretation of an RFP's requirements. RFPs, therefore, promote a diversity of thinking and encourage vendors to provide unique solutions based on their products and services.

An RFP also establishes a competitive environment among vendors that allows the buyer to select the best solution at the best price. Together, the RFP and the winning proposal become the foundation for the contract, which defines the solution and the project implementation tasks and establishes performance goals.

RFP requirements should not be too tightly constrained because fewer vendors will be able to bid on the project. Because the RIM vendor community is large and diverse, the RFP team should be open to a variety of solutions (within reason) and teaming arrangements. The RFP process will help the team make the right decision by minimizing the risk of selecting a vendor and solution that are not right for the application. ▐▌

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