



Contracting for Reformatting Services: A Step-by-Step Process

Handout based on the presentation Contracting for Reformatting Services created by George Blood, President, Safe Sound Archive and Alan Lewis, Consultant in Audiovisual Archives. The original lecture was presented as part of CCAHA's A Race Against Time: Preserving Our Audiovisual Media conference.

Below is an outline of the typical contracting process at many government-run organizations or large institutions. While the complexity of the process might not be necessary for every institution, it is important to take all aspects of project planning and execution into consideration before starting any reformatting or preservation project.

This outline simplifies the process by breaking it down into three steps: (1) How to procure a vendor, (2) How to write a Statement of Work, and (3) How to select a vendor.

- The Procurement Process

1. Identify the need for reformatting and its place in the institution's overall priorities.
2. Justify the project to "higher authority," secure the funds and get the okay to proceed.
3. Prepare a thorough and detailed project description.
 - i) Are you qualified to prepare such a description? Is this an RfB (you know what you want) or RfP (you're pretty sure but you're open to suggestions)?
 - ii) Do you need to hire a consultant?
4. Identify vendors who can provide the required service.
5. Do a market survey to get a sense of the costs involved – and maybe more options. This may be difficult to do since many factors may affect the quote.
6. Organize the purchasing process within the institution, including how the vendor responses will be evaluated for ability to provide service and cost.
7. Write the Statement of Work (SOW).
8. Based on the requirements of the SOW, develop a standardized price response sheet.
9. Publish the solicitation with its SOW in accordance with institutional policies, procedures and communications channels and also to potential vendors you know who may not be reached by those regular channels.
10. Receive responses up to the deadline date.



11. In a timely fashion, evaluate the responses for technical merit. Request additional information/clarification. Terminology varies within the trade.
12. In a timely fashion, evaluate the responses for their costs. Request additional clarification for outlying (too high or too low) bids.
13. In a timely fashion, combine the findings of technical merit and acceptable costs to determine the best value to your institution. Note that “best value” may not be the lowest bid price.
14. Award the contract and begin work. Much preparation may be needed (like paperwork and purchase orders) to begin the project. Make clear in the RfP/SOW the time line between receipt of proposal, evaluation, work start and work completion.
15. Monitor a first test batch and then monitor continuously as the work progresses.
16. At the completion of the project, make the final payment and close the file.

- The Statement of Work (SOW)

The success of the project hinges on a well thought out and well written Statement of Work (SOW). It is the document that crystallizes your thinking, enables vendors to accurately bid on the work, and provides a means by which you evaluate how well the vendor is doing the work.

1. Describe in great detail the “source documents” that are to be copied: ages, quantities, sizes, formats, shapes, speeds, diameters, packaging and physical condition. Vendors need to know all the pertinent details about the materials.
 - i) This should be organized at the item level. Confer with vendor about what information is meaningful. Do you want the vendor to proof/update/return this information for your records? Often this information is extremely limited due to knowledge of and about the materials.
2. Describe in detail the vendor’s deliverables: what product is your institution’s desired end?
 - i) Do you know what you need (RfB) or do you need assistance because this is new to you? Include the vendor in the process of writing these descriptions. There is no reason to re-invent the wheel when existing terminology or convention exists (such as describing folder nests, or metadata standards).
3. Define the “mechanics” of the project as you wish them to be: batching of source documents, shipping methods to be used, timelines and deadlines, billing frequency and billing details, etc. Include the vendor in these discussions. The vendor should have



prior experience organizing these issues for these media. Their existing systems may or may not adapt to your request; but your systems might adapt easily.

4. Describe what else you might supply in addition to the source documents, such as rehousing materials.
5. Require the vendor to (1.) describe its corporate qualifications to do this specific work and (2) identify by name and qualifications the staff members who will conduct various functions.
6. Require a detailed description of how the vendor will assure the quality of the final product. A good quality assurance culture has checks and balances that feed back into the system to eliminate errors at their source.
7. Describe the requirements of how the new work products are to be packaged. This goes for each item (think: delivery of raw files, folder nests), and shipping batches (boxes of materials).
8. Describe how the new work products are to be labeled or otherwise identified.
9. Describe how you require the vendor to handle and ship your media and/or data.
10. Require a list of the equipment to be used in playing back your source documents and a statement of how the equipment will be maintained during the duration of the project.
11. Require the vendors to describe the physical security, fire, and water protection of its work site.
12. Require the vendor to agree to the kind of documentation you will require to describe how your media were handled during the project.
13. Describe the kinds of periodic progress reporting you will require and how invoicing is to be done.
14. State a requirement to be allowed a visit to the vendor's site as a part of your bid evaluation process.
15. State a requirement to be allowed occasional inspection of the vendor's site during the work.
16. Require the vendor to provide a list of clients for whom it has done similar work in the past. The list should include individual's names, telephone numbers and e-mail addresses. (You can use these contacts to reach other former clients of the vendor in order to get further opinions)



- Selecting the Vendor

There are many factors to take into consideration for selecting the vendor that is right for your particular collection. Below are some of the questions you may ask before selecting a vendor.

1. Does the response meet all of the requirements of the SOW? If not, why not?
2. Are the costs in line with your market survey? If not, why not, and are they justified?
3. How long has the vendor been in business and doing this specific kind of work? Have the staff come from another firm? Have they been doing related work?
4. Has the vendor substantiated that it can do this particular work successfully?
5. How well-trained and experienced are the vendor's personnel?
6. Are you satisfied with the equipment and its maintenance schedule?
7. Will the vendor allow reference checks?
8. Does the vendor's site meet your needs for the security and safety of your materials?
9. Are you satisfied with the proposed quality assurance program to ensure that the work product is as good as possible?
10. Is the vendor's financial history stable and are the proposed financial arrangements with your institution acceptable?
11. Does the vendor offer anything over and above the requirements of the SOW?
12. Based on the review of all the bids reviewed, make a Best Value determination. Best Value = the best technical response + an acceptable cost.