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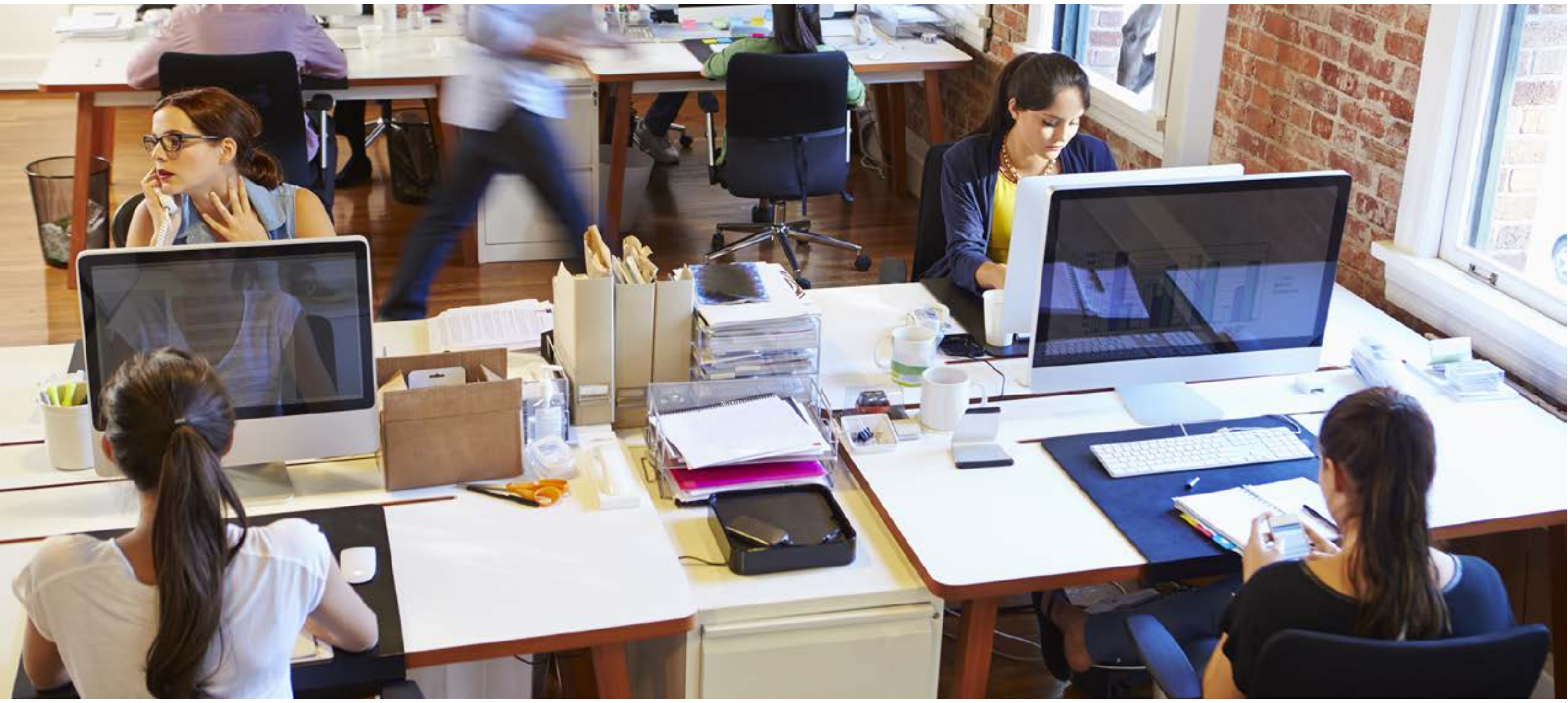

RESEARCH REPORT

Procuring Research and Evaluation Services

A Guide for CCDF Lead Agencies and Researchers

July 2020

OPRE Report #2020-89

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Overview

Introduction

Every Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Lead Agency can use research and evaluation services. Even if your agency has an internal research department, sometimes you may need to procure (i.e., contract out) specialized research or evaluation services. You can be more successful in getting the research and evaluation services you need if you have some understanding of the procurement process in your state.

Purpose

This guide aims to help CCDF Lead Agencies understand some basics about procurement. It defines key procurement terms and suggests where to look for your state's procurement requirements. The guide walks you through key steps for procuring research and evaluation services. It also provides a checklist and glossary for easy reference. Resources are linked throughout the document where you can access more information on each topic.

Key Findings and Highlights

Navigating state procurement requirements may be challenging at first. States vary in their specific procurement procedures, and procurement has its own vocabulary.

To procure research and evaluation services, here are some steps you need to take:

- determine what you need,
- learn the procurement requirements in your state,
- write up and advertise what you need, and
- review proposals and select who will do the work.

Many steps in the process will require your team to seek help from other state agencies. Give yourself some lead time to figure out all the required steps and approvals.

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Introduction

All Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Lead Agencies can use research and evaluation to understand how current services are working and the needs of children and families, programs, and providers in their state, tribe, or territory. However, even if your agency has an internal research department, sometimes you may need to procure (i.e., contract out) specialized research or evaluation services.

This guide aims to help CCDF Lead Agencies understand some basics about state[1] procurement procedures overall and know what to consider when planning for and running research and evaluation procurements. We start by defining procurement. Then we provide information, tips, and resources about the process of procuring research and evaluation services. The guide concludes with a recap of key points, followed by a **Research and Evaluation Procurement Checklist** (see appendix A) and **a glossary of key procurement-related terms** (see appendix B). Throughout the guide we try to introduce the technical terms and steps of procurement in an understandable way to make it easier for you to have future conversations with the people working in your state procurement offices. Glossary terms are in **bold** the first time they appear in the text.

What Is Procurement?

Procurement is the process of obtaining goods and services from an outside source rather than making or providing them in-house. State governments procure all types of goods and services, from office supplies to construction **contracts** for roads and buildings to research and evaluation. Some procurement practices are common regardless of the goods or services being procured. However, you should be aware of the differences that apply to procuring research and evaluation services.

> ***Public Procurement is*** the "process of identifying what is needed; determining who the best person or organization is to supply this need; and ensuring what is needed is delivered to the right place, at the right time, for the best price and that all this is done in a fair and open matter" (OECD Recommendation of the Council on Public Procurement 2015)

[1] Although CCDF Lead Agencies are in states, territories, and tribes, we refer to states here because we focused our review on state procurement procedures. Many considerations are likely to be similar for territories and tribes.

Getting the services you need for the best price in a fair and open manner typically involves creating a **solicitation**, often called a **Request for Proposal** (RFP). The solicitation explains what the government is looking for and is typically **posted** publicly so that all eligible organizations may respond with their **bid** (proposed approach and the price for accomplishing the work). Throughout this guide, we explain what you should consider when designing and executing **procurement** procedures.

Some states may have detailed internal guidance on procurement, but not all states do. This guide and the accompanying checklist have seven sections with key questions that will help guide you through the research procurement process: [2]

1. Identify research and evaluation needs
2. Learn procurement requirements in your state
3. Understand the types of procurement **vehicles**
4. Include key features in your request for proposal (RFP)[3]
5. Consider project data needs and requirements
6. Review submitted proposals
7. Notify **selected bidders** and **nonawardees**

[2] This brief was developed through a structured scan of professional evaluation organizations, state procurement offices, and other materials that highlight lessons learned from the procurement procedures. We expand on the literature with lessons learned from CCDF administrators' attempts to procure research and evaluation.

[3] We use the term Request for Proposal (RFP) as a generic term for all solicitations. Various similar phrases are used to represent different solicitation structures across states.

1. Identify Research and Evaluation Needs

CCDF Lead Agencies may need research and evaluation services. It is difficult for any one department to have expertise in the many different specialty areas of research and evaluation they perform or to have time to conduct all the research and evaluation projects the lead agency needs. Sometimes funders require external researchers. Therefore, a first step is to figure out what types of research and evaluation you need. Next, you must decide if you need to procure outside research and evaluation services, or if your agency has the internal capacity to perform the work.

What Types of Research and Evaluation Services Would Help Us?

You might be interested in procuring research and evaluation services to better understand how well your current services are meeting families' needs. You might be interested in tracking how a new program or policy is implemented, including documenting challenges and changes from initial plans, to learn how to make needed adjustments to your programs and policies. You might want help measuring success in operational terms (e.g., efficiency, wait times, customer service) and quantities of services delivered. You might want an impact evaluation that can help you rigorously evaluate the outcomes of programs and policies so you can understand how they affect child development and affordability, access, and quality of care. All of these are examples of the types of questions you can ask researchers to develop methods to answer.

For further information on research and evaluation by CCDF lead agencies, see *Research and Evaluation Capacity Building: A Resource Guide for Child Care and Development Fund Lead Agencies* (Rohacek, Coffey, Isaacs, and Stevens 2019).

For definitions of research and evaluation types, and to use evaluation and continuous quality improvement to build early childhood systems, see *Early Childhood Systems Building Guide*, "Chapter 8: Program Evaluation and Continuous Quality Improvement" (Child Care State Capacity Building Center 2019).

Should We Use an External or Internal Research Partner?[4]

As you get started, consider if you want to work with an external or internal **research partner**. *Often, the best choice may be to use both.* There are some situations where one group may be preferred over the other. As fellow state employees, internal partners (in some states, this includes in-state universities) may be allowed to access your administrative data with fewer data-sharing requirements; therefore, they may be able to do the research more quickly than an external partner would. Similarly, quick turnaround analyses to respond to legislative requests may also be best done in-house. However, an external partner may have specialized expertise to design and carry out particular types of studies. When you expect study results to be particularly sensitive, stakeholders may think that results produced by an external partner are more credible. Sometimes external funders require external researchers.

You also may find that working with multiple partners at the same time best meets your needs. Internal and external researchers working together may enhance each other's work. For example, an external research partner can serve as an advisor that reviews the proposed research methods for the internal research. Internal partners may have better insights on how to interpret analyses and present findings so they are understandable to many audiences. Similarly, external researchers will need some in-house support to understand administrative data structures and definitions, and your state's programmatic and policy contexts. You may also want to work with several external researchers with differing specialty areas to support you in meeting multiple goals at once. *If you need an external researcher or evaluator, you need to procure research and evaluation services.*

For further information on choosing an external vs. internal evaluator, see "Five Steps for Selecting an Evaluator: A Guide for Out-of-School Time Practitioners" (Bronte-Tinkew, Joyner, and Allen 2007).

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[4] We use the term research partner in this brief to refer to all types of organizations and arrangements that provide research and evaluation services. In some contexts, research partner denotes a particular type or structure to the relationship between the state and the research organization.

Are We Aware of Potential Research Partners?

As you consider your research needs, it may be useful to think about potential research partners that could become **bidders** for procurement opportunities. These partners may be in state or out of state and may include the following:

- **Academic researchers** may be affiliated with academic departments or research centers at universities or colleges, in state or out of state. Interested researchers may focus on child and human development, child care, early care and education, economics, social services, program evaluation, public policy, or other areas.
- **Independent research institutes** may be nonprofit, for profit, or employee-owned cooperatives. Some organizations specialize in a single policy area such as education, whereas others may cover a wide variety of subjects.
- **Consulting firms** are usually large organizations, mostly for profit. They tend to focus on business management or policy issues.
- **Small businesses** sometimes provide research and evaluation services. These are mostly for profit. They are more likely to specialize in a certain type of research or evaluation service.
- **Community-based multipurpose organizations** may provide training, subsidy, or parent education services but also do research. Their practitioner-researcher lens can be useful. Child care resource and referral agencies are one example of this type of organization.
- **Independent consultants** may offer their expertise for short-term issues or as longer-term advisors. Sometimes they work at one of the firms listed above but may also be contracted independently.
- **Researchers in the state government**, but outside your department, may have capacity to work on a research project for you. Working with someone who is “behind the firewall” may expedite the data-sharing process.

2. Learn Procurement Requirements in Your State

It is important that you understand the basics of procurement and the procurement requirements in your state. You will want to learn about the requirements *before* you are interested in procuring research and evaluation services. This advance knowledge will help you plan because you will know what your procurement office expects and allows. You will know how many months it will take to begin working on your new research or evaluation project and other important information that can help make the process smoother.

Where Can We Find Relevant Procurement Guidelines?

You may need to consult both your state's central procurement office and requirements that may be internal to your particular state agency. If you are using a funding stream other than your state budget, then you also need to refer to those funders' guidelines.

Depending on the staffing structure of your agency, there may be a staff member who is assigned to stay up to date on the state guidelines. It is always good to check in with them before you start the procurement process.

Most states' primary procurement office can be found in the state's Department of Administration. The National Association of State Procurement Officials (NASPO) provides information on each state's procurement office and contact information for key staff as well as the state's procurement guidelines. Your state's procurement website may have a procurement manual that covers many of the topics in this guide. Research services are often not mentioned in the state's procurement guidelines; however, relevant information can sometimes be found under consultant services. You may need to talk to several people to get the information you need because procurement offices may lack specific knowledge on procuring research services.

What Does the State Procurement Office Do?

State procurement offices are typically responsible for developing rules, policies, and procedures that guide procurement in the state. Sometimes they provide training to support compliance with these

policies. They typically provide a process for vendor registration (vendors, or potential bidders, are organizations that sell services to the state). They maintain supplier (or vendor) relationships. They establish statewide or agency-specific contracts. They perform contract oversight, and they resolve contract disputes.

In some states, the central state procurement office can delegate their authority to procurement offices in other agencies. Delegated authority may include allowing other state agencies to issue solicitations (requests for goods or services) or make awards. Delegated authority may be limited to the use of statewide contracts or within a certain capped dollar amount.

See NASPO (http://www.naspo.org/) for further information on structure and responsibilities of procurement offices in the United States.

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3. Understand the Types of Procurement Vehicles

Procurement vehicles are different ways to solicit proposals and award the work. Each state will have its own requirements. You should become familiar with the full range of options in your state before you design your solicitation because the options available may differ by award type, award amount, award length, and the amount of control you have over the work. See appendix B for examples of procurement vehicle types and terms that your state procurement office might use.

Do We Need to Use a Competitive Bidding Process?

Competitive bidding is a process for selecting organizations based on the best response to a solicitation open to multiple bidders. This is different from a state reaching out to one organization and asking for their help doing the work. Each state has its own criteria for when competitive bidding processes are required. Some states do not require competitive bidding if other state institutions (e.g., state universities) are used for the research. Many states set a minimum project budget for requiring a competitive process. Whether your state requires a competitive process or not, the information in this guide will still be helpful in getting the research and evaluation services that best meet your needs.

If you need a competitive bidding process, then you might use a procurement vehicle called a Request for Proposal (RFP), which is a formal invitation to potential bidders to submit a proposal in response to your research or evaluation need (in other words, you probably have a specific study in mind or specific report that you need to produce). The proposals submitted by research organizations in response to the RFP are the primary way that you can evaluate which outside organization is best suited to the needs of your project (see sections below on developing your RFP and assessing bidders).

How Can We Increase the Chances That a Wide Range of Organizations Will Bid on Our Projects?

Once you decide that you need a competitive bidding process, you may want to use some strategies to increase the chances that a wide range of organizations will submit bids to conduct your research. State agencies can alert potential bidders to upcoming opportunities for research and evaluation work in

different ways, while still maintaining fair and open competition. Some methods help the state know in advance the capabilities of the organizations that might bid, and some may help identify areas where the state's requirements are not clear. Other methods simply help organizations prepare for the opportunity to bid. Particular options for announcing solicitations and the terms used to describe those options vary by state.

Before releasing your RFP, you may want to consider issuing a request for capabilities, **Request for Information (RFI)**, Intent to Bid, or Special Notice. These are the names for similar ways to announce that your state will be seeking work soon and ask for a voluntary action from the potential bidders to provide information about their capabilities. You may also want to consider a **presolicitation conference,** which is an open forum held by the government-contracting agency before a solicitation's release to get comments and questions from potential bidders regarding a draft solicitation. The presolicitation conference may be held in-person only or include phone or virtual participation. Either presolicitation activity can help you identify and fix issues about a planned **acquisition** (e.g., research and evaluation services you hope to get), regarding contract type, terms and conditions, schedules, requirements (statements of work, performance, and data issues), and the clarity of instructions and evaluation criteria.

If your state allows it, consider posting your presolicitation and RFPs to research and evaluation professional association sites, such as the American Evaluation Association, that reach a national audience of potential bidders who might not be familiar with your state's procurement systems. Make sure you provide fair and open information that does not give particular bidders an unfair advantage by leaking inside information. Your state may require organizations to enter information into a state system before they can view the full solicitation but may still allow posting of basic information about the opportunity to an alternate site. If you only post to your state's existing site, then you will reach a smaller set of potential research partners who are already looking for announcements from your state.

For further information on how RFIs can be used to inform the RFP process, see "Everybody Wins: Crafting a Solicitation that Fosters Transparency, Best Value, and Collaborative Partnership" (NIGP Business Council 2014).

The American Evaluation Association provides the opportunity to connect with potential researchers and evaluators through the Career section of their website. Researchers and evaluators go there to find out about job opportunities, including RFPs. Go to www.eval.org to learn more about this option, and be sure to check with your procurement office about allowable listing options.

Should We Award the Work through a Contract, Cooperative Agreement, or Grant?

As you start, you need to decide if the work should be done using a **contract**, **cooperative agreement**, or **grant**. These options vary in the amount of control you will have to guide the project. Contracts allow for the most technical and financial oversight, followed by cooperative agreements and grants. It is important to check with your state about the award requirements and amount of control your agency can exercise through each of these vehicles.

Contracts may be awarded through different financial structures that determine for what costs organizations will be paid and the timing of payments. It is important to discuss with your state procurement office the types of budget uncertainty or risks that your project may face so they can help you select the correct award vehicle and cost structure. The type of award vehicle may determine which research organizations decide to bid or how they structure their estimated budgets, so it is important to determine the likely award vehicle early in the process of developing your solicitation.

When your specific research and evaluation needs are less certain, you might consider offering contracts through a vehicle sometimes referred to as an **Umbrella Contract** (see appendix B for other terms describing this type of contract). Your state may allow you to create a solicitation that focuses on the qualifications and pricing of eligible firms and the general approach the organizations would take in working with your staff. The solicitation would allow organizations to become prequalified to work with your team and to bid on more specific opportunities for the duration of the umbrella contract, which may be called *Task Orders*. The rest of this guide does not focus on this type of solicitation, but many of the same considerations are relevant.

Cooperative agreements or grants are award vehicles that provide less control over the research and evaluation activities and typically have fewer reporting requirements than contracts. The state would share a general focus for their research interests but allow bidders to specify the particular design of the work within that focus area. In a cooperative agreement, the state and selected bidder would work closely together to define the focus of work postaward. In a grant, the state would agree to the bidder's proposed focus and approach at the time of the award.

If you are using funding other than state dollars to make the award (for example, perhaps you received funding from a foundation or the federal government), it is also important to consider the funder's requirements when you select the award vehicle. The award vehicle the funder uses to provide the money to your state need not be the same award vehicle you use in securing a research partner. For

example, you may have received funding through a foundation grant (the award vehicle), and you are seeking an external research partner to help you investigate an issue. You may decide that you want to use a contract (rather than a grant) as the award vehicle with your external research partner because you want a very specific service and to have more control over the research and evaluation activities they provide.

4. Include Key Features in Your Request for Proposal

It is important that your Request for Proposal (RFP) or other solicitation vehicle shows the potential bidder what research and evaluation services are required. It should also list the information you want from the bidder. Make sure you write key sections—including the research questions and methods—in ways that draw out clear, well-designed responses from bidders. As you write these sections, think about what information you will need from bidders to evaluate proposals and select a research partner. Your agency may have a template to use when writing an RFP, but make sure you delete any irrelevant items before you release the solicitation. You also may find it useful to examine past examples of RFPs. Be sure to check your state procurement guidelines for any required sections or changes since the last time your department issued an RFP. (See tip resource at the end of section 4, "Guidelines for Working with Third Party Evaluators," for more help.)

Purpose or Goals of the Research Procurement

The purpose section of your RFP includes a brief overview of the research you want done and why you want to procure it. It may highlight previous research that has been done. If relevant, your agency will describe the program or project to be studied and if the study is required because of a governmental mandate. This section also highlights the key stakeholders that the bidder should know about.

Statement of Work

The **statement of work** outlines the work or tasks that the state agency wants the researcher to do. Below we outline elements a typical statement of work would include.

- Describe the technical approach to meet your research need. This includes the research questions and general methods and the activities (tasks) of the work. Although you may want to suggest a research approach, you also may invite respondents to propose different approaches. For example, you may specify a telephone survey but invite respondents to propose a different survey mode (e.g., in-person, web) if they think it is preferred, along with the rationale for why it should be used. Or you may not want to suggest a research approach at all and just ask

respondents to propose an approach based on their expertise and experience doing research. You should ask respondents to specify their evaluation or research design, plans for data collection (methods, procedures, and instruments), plans for engaging experts or stakeholders, plans for data security and analysis, plans for disseminating findings, and plans for project management and quality assurance techniques.

- Specify key **deliverables**, the items that will be provided as a result of the work. If you want electronic copies of deliverables, copies of any datasets, or data documentation, list these in your RFP. If you expect the research team to provide you with multiple drafts for written deliverables where you provide feedback and they respond, specify that. You may want to provide flexibility in the contract for changes during the contract period, including adding or removing products and funding. If you do include this flexibility, indicate the circumstances under which different options would happen.
- State the dissemination activities you want or will allow the selected bidder to engage in. Make sure you note which products will be used for internal purposes, which will be disseminated externally, and whether the research partner will have the option to develop their own materials to disseminate (e.g., perhaps the researcher would want to present on techniques or findings at a research conference, publish related information in an academic journal, or publish a report on the research firm's website). What types of permissions are needed for the research partner to disseminate information from the study either during or after the agreement period?
- Be clear about data ownership during and after the project, including new data collected or new datasets created by the research partner from existing data. Clarify if the research partner may use the data for purposes other than those specified in the original data-sharing agreement either during or after the contract ends.
- Provide a project timeline that describes the timing of tasks and deliverables. Some types of research are done within a short time frame (e.g., 1–6 months), but some larger-scale studies can take several years. Consider the time frames necessary for getting data (see section below on data requirements) and likely timelines for review in your own agency and state procurement office, and when your agency needs the research results. Timelines may set specific due dates (e.g., March 2020 for a draft deliverable) or may set deadlines in terms of weeks after an award is made (e.g., 26 weeks after contract award). Using weeks after award rather than fixed dates accounts for unexpected delays in the RFP release, the award of work, or contract negotiations. Yet fixed dates may be the most appropriate option if your state

needs products at a certain time. A mixed approach may also be used (e.g., March 2020 for the first draft of the report and three weeks following receipt of feedback for the final draft).

- Provide expectations for communication between your agency and the research team. Include when the research team is expected to consult with the state agency or other stakeholders at various decision-points in the project. More generally, it is important to specify the role of agency staff in the work (Graig 2011). Let the bidder know if you expect to have regular meetings between agency staff and the contractor and/or a final briefing for agency staff.

Expertise and Qualifications of Bidders

You will want bidders to describe the proposed research team, including their qualifications and proposed hours or full-time equivalent (FTEs) they expect that these researchers will work on the project. You want to be sure that you get information about the particular researchers who will manage and work on your project, not just about the capabilities of the organization as a whole. When you award the contract, you may want to make sure that the staff members proposed on the bid will be the ones leading key elements of the project or the project as whole. In your contract you can specify key personnel whose replacement on the project must be approved by the state agency. Sometimes proposed staff will leave their research organizations or go out on extended leave, so these contract provisions help make sure that someone equally qualified will take on the work.

Beyond staff qualifications, you may ask for background on the organization, including its capacity to manage projects and financial obligations, relevant past experience, and client references, as well as other information needed to assess bidders (e.g., résumés of key personnel, samples of previous work). See the "Review Criteria" section below for other things you may want to consider, such as if the research team has the right qualifications and if the research organization and team have the capacity to manage your project.

Budget Guidance

You may also include total costs or expected level of effort in the solicitation if your state procurement office allows it. Some solicitations may list a dollar amount or range to help bidders understand the scope of work and the project's resource limitations, while others let the bidder estimate the resources needed to complete the study. Estimating research costs can be very difficult, and comparing costs

across bidders can be even more challenging. Costs related to staff time are likely to be the largest set of expenses. Having bidders provide numbers of staff hours they expect to spend on particular components of the project can help you compare costs across bidders. For example, all your bidders might say they expect to spend the same number of hours for a particular task, but the costs for each of them differ because of different salary rates or cost structures of the organization. Reviewing contract costs for similar past work may also be helpful. If your agency does not have any such records, check with your contracts office to see if they do.

You will want the bidders to submit a budget with enough detail for you to evaluate if it is appropriate and in line with their research plan (e.g., is the budget sufficient to do the work but not extravagant). If the project has multiple tasks or activities, you may want the budget broken down by activity. For example, perhaps you have asked bidders to propose developing and conducting a survey. It may be easier to understand if you have bidders separate the costs of developing the survey and conducting the survey. To make sure you have everything you need, you can provide a budget template in your solicitation. Budgets may include details about the hourly rates and benefits for all personnel as well as an estimate of other project expenses. Some bidders will list their overhead or indirect cost rates[5] grouped together in a single line and others will separate each cost into a different line. Overhead or indirect costs are those that an organization spreads across multiple projects or departments—for example, rent or accounting services costs.

Your agency may have a cap on overhead or indirect cost rates bidders may charge, restrictions on traveling or travel rates, or other budget categories where expenses may be restricted. If so, be sure to include that in the budget instructions. Organizations that regularly perform research for the federal government are likely to have negotiated indirect cost rates (NICRA); see footnote 5 for more information about the rates used for educational institutions and nonprofit organizations. Clearly stating limits for indirect cost rates or certain types of budget expenses helps organizations determine whether or not to apply based on their ability to accommodate the limits.

[5] State staff members unfamiliar with indirect cost rates may find it helpful to reference federal indirect cost rate principles. Federal cost principles for educational institutions may be found here: Office of Management and Budget, 2 CFR 215 and 220, Cost Principles for Educational Institutions (OMB Circular A–21), 70 Fed. Reg. 168 (August 31, 2005), https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/whitehouse.gov/files/omb/federal_register/FR2005/083105_a21.pdf. Federal cost rates for nonprofit organizations may be found here: Office of Management and Budget, 2 CFR 230, Cost Principles for Non-Profit Organizations (OMB Circular A-122), 70 Fed. Reg. 168 (August 31, 2005), https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/whitehouse.gov/files/omb/federal_register/FR2005/083105_a122.pdf.

Sometimes the budget is requested as a separate document so that the proposal can be evaluated on technical merits before considering costs (See Section 6 “Review the Submitted Proposals” for more on the evaluation process.)

Procurement Timeline

To figure out the procurement timeline, it is helpful to estimate the date when you will need the final product and the date that you hope work would need to begin. Estimate how much time will be needed for the following: developing your proposal solicitation requirements; getting approval from the required entities within your state to post your solicitation; advertising the solicitation; bidders responding to the solicitation with quality submissions; answering questions about the solicitation; reviewing the proposal; and establishing the contract. If you do not build a long enough timeline, you may find yourself signing a contract after the anticipated project start date.

Consider whether the time frame that the solicitation will be open to bidders is long enough to allow them to submit a quality bid. Heinemeier, D’Agostino, Lammert, and Fiore (2014) recommend giving bidders a minimum of four weeks to respond. If your solicitation requests research that is more complex, such as doing an impact evaluation or developing a measurement tool, you may want to provide more time for organizations to respond. However, if your solicitation is making a routine request or seeking a descriptive study of activities, needs, or gaps (rather than a study of impacts), then potential bidders can probably provide high-quality proposals in a shorter amount of time (e.g., the recommended four-week minimum).

Having a short timeline for submission may keep some organizations from bidding. Universities and large research firms may have an Office of Sponsored Research that must review and approve proposals before they can be submitted. Quick turnarounds are difficult for small research groups or independent consultants who may be too occupied with current work to move quickly on your opportunity. If you are trying to encourage organizations who have not previously bid on your proposals to do so, then a longer turnaround time will also be helpful. As noted earlier, letting potential bidders know about the solicitation in advance can improve the quality of submissions because they will plan for and set aside time to work on the proposal when it comes out. Sometimes bidders may ask for an extension; it is helpful to have a preestablished policy about if and how extensions would be granted.

Giving the Bidders an Opportunity to Ask Questions

Despite your best efforts to clearly explain needs and requirements in the solicitation, potential bidders are likely to have some questions. Allowing bidders to ask clarifying questions can improve the quality of the proposals. Providing a clear process for asking and answering questions is one way to make sure the solicitation process is fair and transparent. Many solicitations include a due date and time for submitting questions and specify who to submit them to. Sometimes they include restrictions about who can be asked questions. For example, the instructions may specify not to ask program staff questions and only to direct questions to contracts staff. For fairness and transparency, typically all questions and answers are listed together and sent back to all groups eligible to bid or are included as an amendment to the original solicitation.

Proposal and Delivery Format

It is easier to manage the review process if all the proposals you receive are in a consistent format. You can specify page limits overall and for particular sections (including for résumés), font size and line spacing (for main text, tables, and figures), and types of attachments you do or do not want to receive. If your reviewers will be looking at hard copies, consider the format (and font sizes) that will be easiest for them to read on paper.

You should specify how the proposals should be submitted (e.g., by email, through a web page, or by mail or delivery service). Be clear about the submission deadline, including the date, time, and time zone. If you want proposals to be submitted by email, consider the size of the documents that your email can handle (especially if receiving multiple submissions) and what types of documents might get blocked. If requesting delivery of hard copies, be sure to specify if in-person deliveries are accepted or specific delivery services (e.g., private courier or particular brand name service) should be used and provide the delivery addresses (which may be different than the regular mailing address). Note how many hard copies must be delivered. This may be dictated by your copy budget and how many people will review the proposal. If you have a lower budget, you will want the bidder to submit enough copies for all reviewers.

Contract Terms, Forms, and Legal Requirements

It is important to state the start and end dates of the project (typically called the period of performance) and if certain parts of the contract are renewable or dependent upon certain conditions. For example, you might start off by awarding a one-year contract that could be renewed based on state needs and satisfaction with the work. Specify payment terms, such as whether there will be monthly payments for all project spending or payments tied to specific deliverables. There may be standard contracting certifications or forms that need to be attached to make sure the contract follows state laws and regulations. Ask others in your agency or state procurement office to make sure that your Request for Proposal includes all the language needed to meet regulatory and payment requirements.

Review Criteria

You should develop your review criteria and scoring methods before releasing your solicitation. It is best to include the criteria in the solicitation so you can match all elements of your solicitation with your criteria. This lets bidders know what matters to you and makes the selection process more transparent. In Section 6, "Review the Submitted Proposals," we discuss the elements of the review process.

Information about the planned disciplines or reviewers' level of research experience on your review panel is also helpful so that bidders use language or examples more closely matching what the review panelists are likely to understand. For example, people trained in different disciplines often have distinct terms for types of research techniques. In addition, different terminology may be used to describe research techniques depending on if the review panel members are or are not trained researchers.

For further guidance on writing an RFP, see *Guidelines for Working with Third-Party Evaluators* (Heinemeier, D'Agostino, Lammert, and Fiore 2014), 10–13.

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5. Consider Project Data Needs and Requirements

Most research and evaluation projects require data (e.g., the information the researcher will examine to answer your questions). The questions below will help you think about data needs as you plan for your research and design your RFP. You will need the help of people outside of your agency to answer some of these questions, so it is important for you to think about them early as you plan your research project.

Can Our Questions Be Answered by Information Our Agency Already Collects?

Many questions that CCDF Lead Agencies have can be answered with information you already collect. The information your agency gathers about the children, families, child care workers, and child care operations you support are administrative records. These records are what researchers call *administrative data* (e.g., data that was originally collected for administration, or program operations, and not originally collected for research). Sometimes you will be interested in questions that can be answered by combining the administrative data from more than one agency; researchers refer to this as *linking administrative data*.

- If some of your questions can be answered through your agency's administrative data, you will need to use a data-sharing agreement (see next bullet). If some of your questions can be answered by linking your agency's administrative data to another agency's administrative data, you also will need to involve those agencies in developing the data-sharing agreement.
- A *data-sharing agreement* is a formal document that says what information will be shared, how it will be shared, and how it will be protected once it is shared. Sometimes called a data-use agreement (DUA), these documents are typically considered legal agreements.
- You should investigate your state's requirements for what must be included in a data-sharing agreement, as well as the process for approving a data-sharing agreement before you advertise your RFP. Establishing these data-sharing agreements can sometimes take multiple years. Your state's requirements and expected timeline will be important to consider as you design the timelines for your study.

For more information about the types of questions that your CCDF Lead Agency can answer with administrative data, see the OPRE-sponsored webinar "A Dozen Policy Questions You Can Answer with Your Agency's Administrative Data." For further guidance on developing data-sharing agreements and examples of agreements, see the OPRE research brief "Guidelines for Developing Data Sharing Agreements to Use State Administrative Data for Early Care and Education Research" (Shaw, Lin, and Maxwell 2018). For more examples of data-sharing agreements, see the William T. Grant Foundation website Research Practice Partnerships: Developing Data Sharing Agreements.

Do We Need Additional Information to Answer Our Questions?

Some questions may be answered by your own administrative data. Others may require other existing or secondary data, such as previous state surveys, Census Bureau data, national surveys such as the National Survey of Early Care and Education, and other sources of information. Yet other questions may require collecting new information (what researchers call primary data).

Primary data may be collected through surveys, interviews, focus groups, or observations. These data can be collected in person, over the phone, or through web-based interactions. Your questions might need data gathered from hundreds or thousands of people, or very small numbers. Researchers might need to visit child care programs or individual people's homes. If you need researchers to collect new data to answer your research questions, your RFP will need to reflect adequate timelines, and you will need to decide on data security and ownership standards. The questions below can help you focus on the most important decisions to make.

For ideas on child and family data sources that may be useful for answering your questions, visit the Child and Family Data Archive.

How Do We Protect the Security of the Data We Share or the Data the Researchers Collect?

It is very important to protect all of the data shared or collected in a research project. You don't want the information to be misused or for people or organizations to be harmed because their data was not kept secure. Generally, you will want to establish standards for the security of the data based on the sensitivity of the information it contains. If it contains personally identifiable information (e.g., names, addresses, social security numbers) or can be connected back to particular people, then security standards will need to be higher.

- Data-sharing agreements will include standards for keeping the data your agency or other agencies are sharing safe. Your state may not allow your agency to share some parts of the records that are most sensitive or are identifiable—that contain the names of the people served. If this is the case, you will need to consider how your agency can remove the identifiers before sharing the data with the researchers. Researchers can provide some guidance about this process, but the agency staff will need to do it because of the security requirements.
- Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) also set ethical standards and have procedures to make sure research participants are protected from harm during the research or after it takes place. Procedures for keeping the data secure while it is being collected, analyzed, and stored are required to get IRB approval. Your state may have its own IRB that researchers must get approval from before they start the research. Some research organizations (universities and some private firms) also have their own IRBs that must approve research procedures before they can begin the work.
  - » Although data security is one important part of an IRBs' work, their main role is to minimize harm to people participating in or whose information is used in the research. Therefore, you may want to require—as part of the contract —the researcher to write a data-security plan to protect the data.

Who Will Own the Data?

During the research project, new data may be gathered and/or existing data may be used. New datasets may be created by linking data from multiple sources together. Where will these data will be stored after the project is over? Will the research partner continue to have access to the data following the project's end? The research partner may be able to do other analyses useful to the state or to

knowledge-building in the field more generally if they can continue to use the data. On the other hand, the state may want to keep ownership of the data for their own staff to do future analyses or for future research projects. Specifying expected data ownership rights in the RFP can be helpful to avoid future misunderstandings. Sometimes as the partners work together over time the nature of the relationship and data sharing may change, so leaving open the possibility of future sharing is recommended, even if you want to be more cautious at the beginning.

Do the Project Requirements Allow Enough Time for Getting, Cleaning, and Analyzing the Necessary Data?

Whether or not your research activities will use administrative data or collect new data, it is important to make sure you allow enough time to get access to, collect, clean, and analyze the data. Similarly, regardless of the types of data needed, you will want to include a planning stage in the project timeline. The planning stage provides an opportunity for your team and the research team to be sure you agree on the proposed approach provided in the bid after the contract award. The plans for collecting and analyzing the data will typically have to be approved by your state IRB and the research organization's IRB. This may be true even when only existing data from external agencies are used (e.g., Census or other similar data sources).

The time needed to get, clean, and analyze the necessary data depends on the types of data that will be gathered:

- If administrative data will be used, a data-sharing agreement will be needed (see above). Once researchers have access to the data, they will need to work with your agency staff to understand the structure and meaning of the data. They will do some simple analyses to look for missing data or mistakes in the data that they will need your team to help them figure out or fill in. Then they will be ready to use the data to answer the questions you have asked.
- If other existing data will be used, the research team will need enough time to request the data, look for mistakes or missing data, and then analyze the data. The amount of time needed for these steps depends on where the data is requested from, how many records are in the data, how many pieces of information are in each record, and the types of analyses performed.
- If the researchers will be collecting new data, this will usually require developing data-collection instruments (e.g., survey, interview, or focus group questions), recruiting participants, collecting the data, cleaning the data, and doing analyses.

6. Review the Submitted Proposals

An important part of the procurement process is determining the quality of the proposals you receive and whether they meet your agency's research needs. The bids will be evaluated by reviewer(s) on the review criteria you included in your solicitation. Your state may have very specific procedures about how proposals should be reviewed, who should review them, how scoring should be done, and the types of information that must be available to either all bidders or bidders who request it after review and award. The questions below will help you find your state-specific requirements and how to plan your process for reviewing proposals.

Did We Receive Enough Proposals?

Your state may require a minimum number of applications, or you may want to have more than one proposal so that you can compare options. It is helpful to track the number of proposals you receive so you can decide to extend the deadline if needed. Two common reasons why bidders may not submit a proposal are a short turnaround time for submission or an RFP that does not allow the bidder flexibility in their proposed approach (NIGP 2014). Understanding the likely applicant pool and the approaches they might take is one reason that states may use a presolicitation activity as outlined in the section "How Can We Increase the Chances That a Wide Range of Organizations Will Bid on Our Projects?"

Who Will Review the Proposals?

You will want a team that can provide insightful and reliable feedback on the proposals. The makeup of the team can vary based on their subject expertise, but it is helpful to have at least one reviewer with methodological expertise, preferably with skills related to the proposed research and evaluation work. You may also want to include members outside of your agency depending on your agency's rules for proposal review. Creating a review panel requires staff time to find members, coordinate meetings, and manage the review process. Peer networks or stakeholder groups may be sources for finding potential reviewers.

Do We Have Clear Criteria for Reviewing the Proposals?

You will want to develop criteria to use when you review the proposals. As noted above, including these criteria in the RFP can help make sure bidders provide the information you need to review the proposals. Some criteria you could include are:

- **Does the bidder understand the research or evaluation goals?** As you review the proposal, you need to decide if the bidder understands the objectives of the RFP and is able to clearly explain the issues at hand.
- **Is the bidder familiar with your context and audiences?** If not, then this can add time needed to coordinate with the research partner. However, the unfamiliar bidder may still be preferred if they have experience doing a specific type of research or evaluation activity.
- **Is the proposed research design appropriate for your purpose and needs? Is it technically sound?** You will likely need at least one reviewer who has strong expertise in research methods. Consider how realistic the proposed research plan is. Have the researchers explained why they proposed specific approaches and what the benefits and limitations of those approaches are, or have they only said what approaches they would use (i.e., are the approaches technically sound)? Researchers may propose work that would be difficult to do in the provided timeline or with the amount of money awarded. Consider what you know about the people or groups that they would need to collect information from: do the ways the bidders talk about recruiting participants for the study or timelines for doing so match with what you know?
- **Does the research team have the right qualifications?** You want to choose a research partner that has the technical skills to complete a high-quality study. You also need a partner who understands the populations of interest and is able to work in the locations needed for the study. Although examples of the research team's published work may be publicly available, your state may not allow you to consider information apart from the proposal. Therefore, it is important that you ask bidders to include all relevant information in the proposal.
    - » To assess qualifications, you might want to request information about the research team's technical and content knowledge (gained through education and/or experience), relevant experience with similar projects, familiarity with respecting rights of study participants (including familiarity with IRBs), communication skills including ability to write user-friendly reports, and track record in completing projects on time and within budget.
    - » You may want to ask the bidder to provide examples of research they have done with a state government agency, using child care data, or other relevant completed projects.

- » You may want bidders to provide work samples or credentials to show their ability to communicate in the language of the population being studied, with cultural sensitivity.
- » You also may want to consider such factors as the location of the bidder (relative to your office and to the intervention sites), especially if the work will require frequent travel to that location or if in-person meetings to discuss the work are preferred.

- **Does the research organization and team have the capacity to manage your project?** Doing research requires technical skills and subject matter expertise to direct the team, communicate with stakeholders, and financially manage the project. Government contracts may require certain types of financial management that all organizations may not be able to handle. You should look for evidence that the bidder is ready for the challenge. For example, you might request examples of completed projects of similar scope or a copy of the most recently completed audit. You may want to have separate criteria to evaluate their technical and financial management capabilities.
- **Are the costs reasonable and within available resources?** In addition to providing a bottom-line cost, the budget can give useful information about staffing structure and costs, including costs for data collection, data analysis, and reporting and dissemination. You may want to select your best proposals from a technical perspective and then negotiate on budget. Reducing the budget, however, often requires scaling back the work.

Have We Decided on a Scoring Process?

The scoring process consists of four primary parts: (1) assigning points on a predetermined scale, (2) standardizing scores across reviewers, (3) aggregating scores across reviewers, and (4) documenting the process and decisions. You should create a manual that describes the scoring process and instructions to ensure consistency across reviewers.

Assigning points on a predetermined scale. You may want to give scores to each of your review criteria, using numerical values to weight the different criteria so that total scores prioritize what is most important to you. For example, research design may be weighted at 40, the team's demonstrated understanding of the evaluation goals at 30, team qualifications at 20, and cost at 10. You may choose to state in the RFP the different weights of the criteria. Sharing how you will score proposals in the RFP makes the selection process more transparent.

Standardizing scores across reviewers. Your reviewers need a common understanding of what a particular score means, and you need to have some confidence that they are rating similarly. Some reviewers may start with the notion that each bid has a perfect score and then deduct points for items they consider to be missing. Other reviewers may start from zero and add on points based on what they see. Others may use the entire range of possible scores, while some reviewers may not. Without specifically stated expectations, you cannot be sure that your reviewers will do the task in the same way. Creating a manual that describes how points are either added or deducted and how the range is used can be a helpful way to make expectations clear. If you will need multiple reviewers, standardizing the scoring process is very important to make sure that all bidders are held to the same requirements.

Combining scores across reviewers. Typically, you will have more than one reviewer for each bid. You need to decide ahead of time how you will combine the scores across reviewers. Will you average scores? Is the person who is managing the process looking at both the score and its qualitative justification to be sure those two things match? Will the reviewers talk to each other to explain their scores and work together to create scores they agree on? Asking reviewers to justify scores can help reveal if some reviewers consistently rate proposals higher or lower than others or if some reviewers are using what they know about the research team beyond the information in the proposal.

Documenting the process and decisions. Your state may have requirements for the types, amount, and format of information that you share with either all bidders or specific bidders about their scores. You need to know about these requirements before you start reviewing so that you write down all the information that you will need to report out. You may also want to debrief with your reviewers to understand from their perspective what worked well or could be improved in the future.

What Is Our Process for Requesting More Information from Finalists?

Sometimes a bidder will address the information requested in the RFP, but you may still want more details about their plan. If the bidder is promising and you want to be more confident in their proposal, check with your procurement office to learn the ways you can communicate with bidders. You will want to have an established procedure indicating who is allowed to email finalists with questions, what types of questions you can ask, how long finalists will be given to respond to the questions, and how answers to the questions will be incorporated in the scoring process.

After reviewing and scoring the proposals, the best candidate may be clear. However, the decision may be difficult if multiple bidders have different positive qualities. When multiple bidders have similar scores, some government agencies may bring the finalists in to meet with the review committee so they can ask additional questions and get a sense of what it would be like to work with each research partner.

Have We Checked the Bidding Organizations' References?

Bidders are likely to provide names of clients who have been satisfied with their services. Even so, you can learn a lot by contacting the references and asking them questions. Consider how the reference checks will be used in the scoring process. Will you only seek references from top-scoring proposals to confirm your selections? Possible questions include the following:[6]

- Did the research organization meet work and project deadlines?
- Would you use the research organization again?
- Was the research team appropriately responsive and collaborative?
- Did the research team stay on budget?

For further guidance on assessing proposals, see "Five Steps for Selecting an Evaluator: A Guide for Out-of-School Time Practitioners" (Bronte-Tinkew, Joyner, and Allen 2007), 4–5, and *Guidelines for Working with Third-Party Evaluators* (Heinemeier, D'Agostino, Lammert, and Fiore 2014), 14–16.

[6] These questions are adapted from a list of ten questions provided in Heinemeier, D'Agostino, Lammert, and Fiore (2014), 16.

7. Notify Selected Bidders and Nonawardees

The final step in the procurement process is to notify your selected bidders and nonawardees. You will also need to decide if you will provide feedback to the organizations whose proposals were not selected.

Do We Have a Process for Notifying Selected Bidders?

Once you decide on the best-scoring proposal, you need to decide who will tell the bidder, how they will be notified (e.g., by phone, letter, or email), and who will work with them to begin the formal process of awarding the contract. Even though you will have tried to make all specifications clear, the contracting departments of the research organizations may try to negotiate changes around data or product ownership or other requirements upon award. Your agency may also want to negotiate some changes in the research design or project terms before finalizing the award.

Do We Have a Process for Notifying Nonawardees?

Once you select a research organization for the award, you need a process in place to contact the nonawardees. Things to consider are how they will be told (e.g., by phone, letter, or email), whether they will be notified individually or through a general announcement, and most importantly, when you will let them know. For example, will you let bidders know that they have lost the bid right after you have notified the selected bidder or will you wait until after the contract with the selected bidder is fully executed and you know that you will not need to make an alternate award?

Will We Provide Feedback to Bidders Who Were Not Selected for Award?

Bidders who are not selected for awards (nonawardees) often want feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of their proposal. This type of feedback helps them determine whether it will be worth their while to bid on another solicitation offered by your organization or how to improve their future proposals to better meet your needs. You do not need to state in your solicitation if feedback will be

provided (though this is probably a good practice). If you do offer it, remember that fair treatment means you should give feedback to all bidders at the same level of detail and in the same way.

If you offer feedback, you will need to collect it from your review panel in consistent ways, to make sure the feedback reflects the scoring criteria and clearly describes the strengths and weaknesses of the proposal. The feedback may or may not include an overall score or information about the score of the bid selected for award—that is up to you. Providing feedback to nonawardees may help you develop your pool of responsive bidders over time, but it does add another layer of complexity and time to your review process. If you decide to offer feedback, it is good practice to let your reviewers know their comments on the proposal will be sent to bidders and give examples of how to write clear comments in the review manual.

Summary

- **Every CCDF Lead Agency has needs for research and evaluation services**. Thinking strategically to assess your research needs and how to best engage internal or external partners is the beginning of the procurement process.
- **Procurement is about getting goods and services from other entities** rather than making or providing them in-house.
- **Public procurement procedures are centered around**
  - » determining what is needed and who can best meet the need at the right place, at the right time, for the best price, and
  - » providing a fair and open process for meeting the needs.
- **States vary in their procurement requirements** and which agencies and departments are allowed to handle procurement. Not all states will have specialized procedures for research and evaluation services.
- **Navigating state procurement procedures may be challenging at first.** Give yourself some lead time to figure out all the required steps and approvals and if you will need to develop additional procedures to get and review a sufficient number and quality of research and evaluation proposals. Various vehicles exist for
  - » announcing or soliciting services and
  - » making the final award and establishing the working relationship.
- **Determining the appropriate procurement vehicle** depends on several factors such as the award amount and the role your agency wants to play in the research.
- **Request for proposal (RFP)** is one of many names used to describe solicitations for research and evaluation work, but regardless of the name, solicitations normally include an overview of the procurement purpose, a statement of work, budget guidance, contractual language, and review criteria.
- **Reviewing the quality and appropriateness** of research and evaluation services requires a proposal review team with some specialized knowledge of appropriate research and evaluation techniques and approaches. Creating clearly defined criteria will help in scoring proposals and avoiding bias.

- **Some specialized features of research and evaluation services solicitations and proposals** include rules for how to share data, interact appropriately with clients, and protect personally identifiable or other sensitive information. These features may require you to interact with more people or departments to develop the solicitation and complete the award.
- Use the **Research and Evaluation Procurement Checklist** (see appendix A) to help you determine what information you need to look for to understand your state's requirements. The checklist will also show you other items to consider for research and evaluation solicitations that your state may not provide guidance on.

Appendix A. Research and Evaluation Procurement Checklist

1. ☐ Do we need to procure research and evaluation services?
    a. ☐ What is procurement?
    b. ☐ What types of research and evaluation services would help us?
    c. ☐ Should we use an internal or external research partner?
    d. ☐ Are we aware of potential research organizations we could partner with?
2. ☐ Do we know the procurement requirements in our state?[7]
    a. ☐ Where can we find relevant procurement guidelines?
    b. ☐ Do we know what the state procurement office does?
3. ☐ What type of procurement vehicle should we use?
    a. ☐ Do we need to use a competitive bidding process?
    b. ☐ How can we increase the chances that a wide range of organizations will bid?
    c. ☐ Should we award the work through a contract, cooperative agreement, or grant?
4. ☐ Have we included the following key features in our Request for Proposal?
    a. ☐ What is our purpose or goal(s) for procurement?
    b. ☐ Do we have a statement of work? Does it
        i. ☐ lay out key goals, research questions, and research methods?
        ii. ☐ state key deliverables?
        iii. ☐ state dissemination activities and requirements?
        iv. ☐ set expectations about data ownership (see also checklist section 5)?
        v. ☐ give timelines for tasks and deliverables?
        vi. ☐ state expectations for project communication and management?
    c. ☐ What expertise and qualifications are we looking for in bidders?
    d. ☐ What budget guidance do we provide?
    e. ☐ What is our procurement timeline?
    f. ☐ Will we provide bidders an opportunity to ask questions?
    g. ☐ What is the format and delivery method for submitting the proposal?
    h. ☐ What are our contract terms, forms, legal requirements, and payment methods?
    i. ☐ What information will we provide about the review criteria and process?
5. ☐ Have we considered data requirements for the research?
    a. ☐ Can our questions be answered by information our agency already collects?
    b. ☐ Do we need additional information to answer our questions?
    c. ☐ How do we protect the security of the data we share or the data the researchers collect?
    d. ☐ Who will own the data?
    e. ☐ Does the project timeline allow enough time for getting, cleaning and analyzing necessary data?

[7] The literature reviewed for this guide focused on state procurement procedures, but many of these considerations apply to procurement of research and evaluation services in any setting.

6. ☐ Do we have a process for reviewing submitted proposals?
    a. ☐ Do we have enough proposals?
    b. ☐ Who will review proposals?
    c. ☐ Do we have clear criteria for reviewing the proposals?
    d. ☐ Do we have a scoring process?
    e. ☐ Do we have a process for requesting more information from finalists?
    f. ☐ How are we checking organizational references for relevant past work?
7. ☐ Do we have a process for notifying selected bidders and nonawardees?
    a. ☐ Do we have a process for notifying the selected bidder?
    b. ☐ Do we have a process for notifying the nonawardees?
    c. ☐ Have we considered how we will give feedback to nonawardees?

Appendix B. Glossary of Procurement Terms

This glossary defines some key procurement terms used in this guide. Each state will have its own particular language or vocabulary, but these terms help you read this guide and seek out information from your state procurement office. We provide simple definitions for these terms using the context of getting research and evaluation services. Some of the terms have other meanings in other contexts.

- **Acquisition:** in this context, the research and evaluation services the state is interested in getting.
- **Bid:** the proposal submitted by a research organization in response to a solicitation that describes the services they propose to provide and the cost of providing those services.
- **Bidder:** an organization responding to a state's announcement that it is interested in getting research or evaluation services.
- **Competitive Bidding**: describes a process for selecting organizations to provide research or other services. The state solicits proposals for the work from multiple bidders and awards the work to the organization that puts forward the best proposal and price, as determined by a clear review process. This is contrasted with a process where a state reaches out to one organization and asks for their help with doing the work.
- **Contract:** type of vehicle for a formal agreement between the state agency and a research organization that was selected to perform the work in response to a particular solicitation. This type of award vehicle is characterized by deliverables that are specified rather than broad and represent a specific state procurement need. This vehicle gives states the most control over the work.
    - **Umbrella contracts:** these are sometimes called Task Order Contracts, Indefinite Quantity Contracts, Indefinite Delivery/Indefinite Quantity Contracts (IDIQ), and Blanket Purchase Agreements (BPA). This type of contract is used when a state expects it will need a range of research and evaluation services over a number of years but doesn't know exactly what those services will be yet. This type of contract provides the state with more flexibility in determining future research needs and establishing one organization or a set of organizations as qualified research partners that can bid on specific opportunities in the future. The state will issue special solicitation opportunities available only to the

organizations holding these contracts when it is ready to specify particular statements of work (see under *Solicitation*).

- **Cooperative agreement:** similar to a grant, an agreement issued by the state to support its objectives or build the state's capacity, including doing basic or exploratory research. Although the research topic is identified, there is no defined statement of work, and the deliverables are usually reports on the progress of the research and the final research results. Different from a grant, this agreement usually means the state is substantially involved in deciding on steps, activities, and timelines with the selected bidder. The state has less control than with a *contract* but more control than with a *grant*.
- **Deliverables:** the products that will be provided during or upon the completion of a research and evaluation project. These products may include items such as progress reports, meeting notes, the design plan, the analysis plan, memos on recruitment or preliminary findings, briefs, and reports. Within an RFP, instructions for deliverables usually include information about how many drafts or redrafts of reports or products will be expected, as well as a timeline specifying when the products must be submitted to the state. Timelines might have specific dates or time periods (e.g., a deliverable might be required in March 2020 or 4 weeks after execution of the contract).
- **Grant:** an agreement issued by the state for the purpose of supporting the state's objectives or building the state's capacity, including doing basic or exploratory research. Although the research topic is identified, there is no defined statement of work, and the deliverables are usually reports on the progress of the research and the final research results. The state is less involved in directing the work than in a *cooperative agreement* or *contract*.
- **Nonawardee:** organizations that submitted proposals in response to the state government solicitation and were not selected for the work (opposite of selected bidder).
- **Posted:** may also be referred to as *Released*; the official process of announcing and distributing state government solicitations. State requirements will specify how and where the announcements of opportunities are released and distributed. States may require that solicitations only be announced through specific state websites or distribution lists. Other states may allow information about the opportunity to be sent out to professional associations to share with their members.
- **Presolicitation conference:** an open forum held by the state before the release of a solicitation to get advice and comments from the research community to shape the solicitation in ways that

will be most appropriate for the state. Such events can help the state better understand limitations and possibilities of the research process to consider when developing the solicitation's requirements and expectations. This is one strategy for increasing the number bidders when a solicitation is posted.

- **Presolicitation notice:** a notice provided by the state that alerts potential bidding organizations to solicitation opportunities coming soon. The content of the notice varies by state requirements. It may only include the name of the solicitation and the agency that will be requesting it, or it may have additional information. This is one strategy for increasing the number of bidders when the solicitation is posted.
- **Procurement:** the process used by states to get goods and services from outside organizations (in this case, research and evaluation services) needed to carry out the work of the state; the process includes ensuring that the most appropriate services are provided at the best price, at the right time, and in a fair and transparent manner.
- **Procurement Vehicles**: the legal formats required by your state for soliciting and awarding the work. For example, a *Request for Proposal* is a type of procurement vehicle that will have certain legal requirements describing when it can or should be used and how it should be used to get bids for services. A *Request for Information* is a vehicle that may be used to alert potential bidders that a *Request for Proposal* is coming soon and to collect some preliminary information from interested organizations. *Contracts* and *grants* are two types of award vehicles for creating the agreements with the selected bidders to do the work.
- **Request for Information (RFI):** also referred to as Intent to Bid or Special Notice; a name for presolicitation announcements that states may distribute with information about an expected solicitation opportunity. These announcements request that organizations that may be interested in responding to the future solicitation opportunity respond to the notice indicating their interest and providing certain types of information about their organization. The content of the notice and information requested will vary by state. This is one strategy for increasing the number of bidders when the solicitation is posted.
- **Request for Proposal (RFP) or Request for Quotation (RFQ)**: see *Solicitation*.
- **Research partner:** in this guide, this term refers to any organization that the state may get research and evaluation services from; in some contexts, "partner" denotes a particular type of relationship between the research organization and the state.

- **Selected bidder:** in this context, the organization selected by the state to perform the research and evaluation services in response to the state's solicitation.
- **Solicitation:** may be called *Request for Proposal (RFP)*, *Request for Quotation (RFQ)*, or other names. States will have specific requirements for the label given to the solicitation. The solicitation is the state's announcement of the procurement opportunity. It specifies the state's needs, including the research and evaluation purpose, services being sought, requirements of interested bidders, time period in which the work will be needed, and time frame for submitting a bid. See guide section *4. Include Key Features in Your Request for Proposal* for a more complete explanation.
    - When a solicitation is posted for specific work covered by a Blanket Purchase Agreement, Indefinite Delivery/Indefinite Quantity (IDIQ), or other Umbrella Contract (see under *Contract*), it is typically called a Request for Services, Request for Task Order Proposals (RFTOP), Task Order, Delivery Order, or Work Order.
- **Statement of Work (SOW):** section of the solicitation that defines project-specific activities, deliverables, and timelines expected for the procurement opportunity; see the *Statement of Work* section in the guide for more information. A Statement of Work will also become part of the official contract when an award is made; the SOW that appears in the contract will be based on the SOW from the solicitation and the awardee's response to the solicitation.

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This guide is a product of the Center for Supporting Research on Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) Implementation. The Center supports the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in learning from research on policies implemented in response to the goals of the CCDBG Act of 2014. Through a contract awarded to the Urban Institute, ACF is helping Child Care and Development Fund Lead Agencies and their partners build capacity to conduct high-quality, rigorous research; informing the development of evidence on CCDBG programs; and facilitating learning from state-, territory-, and tribal-level research on the CCDBG.

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