

INDIAN ASSESSMENT PROGRAM TENDER GUIDELINES

Introduction

The Association of Test Publishers (ATP)-India has developed these Guidelines, and related best practices, for use by organizations seeking to procure testing services. Although computer-based testing is well-utilized in India, these Guidelines are general in nature and can easily apply to all types and forms of assessment, from paper-based to all forms of technology-based assessments (e.g., CBT, CAT, LOFT). Such testing services may be used for educational placement, to award a certificate or license, to determine language proficiency or suitability for employment (does a test taker meet the qualifications for a job or promotion), or they may be related to a lower-stakes educational program that does not include any high stakes. In other situations, some procurement may include the need for the provision of testing facilities while others may not. However, all programs today include the need for test security requirements, in order to protect both the integrity of the assessments and of the organization sponsoring the testing program.

A procuring entity must write a solicitation or tender document, which may take different forms, such as Request for Proposal (RFP), a Request for Quotation (RFQ), a Request for Information (RFI), a Request for Submission (RFS), or even an Invitation to Bid (ITB) or Letter of Invitation. For the purposes of this document, all such forms will be referenced as an RFP. In India, some clients use an Expression of Interest (EOI), which is similar to an RFI, to identify which companies may be interested in bidding on a project and their background and qualifications/capabilities – however, it should be noted that if a client uses an EOI, it should be careful not to use this process to exclude unfairly any potential bidders (e.g., posting unreasonably high qualifications or other requirements that result in eliminating otherwise qualified bidders from participating in the RFP). While it may be that an EOI can serve to eliminate obviously unqualified vendors, ATP-India recommends that use of a comprehensive RFP is the best avenue for a client to make the most informed decision in choosing a vendor (service provider).

The overarching goal of the document is to assist a procurer of testing services (client) in writing an RFP that contains all the necessary and appropriate information to allow all qualified bidders to understand the scope and specifications of the program being bid, as well as all requirements upon which bidders will be judged. Such a comprehensive RFP will result in a transparent process, assuring that the client will be inclusive in its selection approach. Best practices for preparing and dealing with the procurement process, developed from all over the world, also are provided in this document, including specific features of the procurement process applicable in India.

Definitions.

“Client” means the entity which contracts for services, whether that is a governmental or private organization, or whether the entity is a test sponsor or a credentialing agency.

“Service Provider” means the entity that provides services to the client. A service provider (i.e., vendor) who supplies services directly to the client is typically considered to be the “prime contractor”

while other entities contracting with the primary service provider to provide parts or components of the overall services, are typically considered to be subcontractors.

“Technology-based assessment” means assessments administered by computer, in either stand-alone or networked configuration, or delivered “online” by some other technology device that is linked to the Internet or World Wide Web, where the test-taker accesses a digitally formatted (non-paper-based) assessment directly, or remotely delivered “offline” through a local server that caches the assessment, or stores the assessment questions on some other medium (e.g., CD, USB flash drive), which enables its access without immediate direct access to the Internet. Technology-based assessments include CAT, CBT and LOFT assessments.

“Computer adaptive test/testing” (CAT) means a technology-based assessment in which the next test question or set of questions is selected by a computer algorithm, based on the test-taker’s performance on questions administered earlier in the assessment, and which allows the assessment to be tailored to each individual test-taker.

“Computer-based test/testing” (CBT) means a technology-based assessment in which a computer or other computing device is used to present a test form to the test-taker.

“Linear-on-the-fly test/testing” (LOFT) means an item bank-based, technology-based, assessment model, in which each test-taker is given a relatively unique test form compiled at the time of administration, where forms are equivalent in content and pre-equated to ensure equitable levels of difficulty and fairness for every test-taker.

“Universal design” means a set of construction principles that seeks to maximize accessibility of an assessment for all test-takers by developing test questions and content without distractions or irrelevancies.

“Accommodation” means a change in the administration of an assessment (including, but not limited to, a change in assessment setting, scheduling, timing, presentation format, response mode, or any combinations of these changes), that does not change the construct intended to be measured by the assessment or the meaning of the resulting scores. An accommodation is used by the client to establish equity and accessibility for all persons taking a specific assessment (e.g., increasing the font size for a visually impaired individual or providing additional time for certain test takers); in India, an accommodation also may mean the provision of boarding for a candidate. A change in the administration of an assessment that alters the construct being measured is considered a modification not an accommodation. Appropriate accommodations for handling test-takers with specific disabilities are usually provided, either by the service provider (test developer) or by the client in an accommodations policy.

Section 1. The client should provide a written overview of the program being bid, along with a written summary of known requirements for the technical portion of the proposal.

1.1 The overview should include at least the following information:

- a history of any relevant assessment programs that the client has implemented, including whether this is an existing or new program;

- a description of the nature and purpose of the existing and proposed assessment programs;
- recent or anticipated changes in policy, procedures, or legislation that will impact contract activities;
- the products and services being solicited, including any requirements for the provision of testing centres or for third-party (consulting) services, such as security, audits, and technology services (e.g., hosting);
- security requirements (e.g., proof of insurance, cyber security insurance, content security, access control);
- the beginning and ending dates of the proposed program;
- an explanation of the client's specified legal order of precedence for selection of a service provider (e.g., Request for Proposal, Question & Answer, Proposal, Oral presentations, Best and Final Offer, Statement of Work);
- the proposal timeline with key procurement dates specified;
- the program timeline with major milestone dates within each calendar or fiscal year, including administration dates (or test windows) of the assessments that the service provider will be responsible for developing and/or administering during each year, or in the alternative, the applicable parameters required if the assessment(s) will be available on demand whenever individual test takers are ready to take the assessment;
- the mandatory requirements of a bidding company, including staffing (e.g., technology, psychometric, content, program management expertise), that must be met for the proposal to be judged as responsive to the RFP;
- a transition plan to describe deliverables (e.g., materials, data) to be transferred at contract inception from a previous service provider and then again contract closure to a new service provider;
- any content standards requirements;
- any technological standards required for system components to be interoperable (e.g., hardware, software, networks) and data interoperability;
- any requirements related to electronic delivery requirements in terms of computing technology platforms, mobile devices, assistive technologies, technology-based testing strategies (e.g., fixed form, computer adaptive, LOFT, mixed mode); and
- any special considerations unique to the client (e.g., procurement laws, regulations, and policies).

1.2 In addition to, or expanding upon the above information, the summary of the technical proposal should provide the client's expectations on at least the following program components:

- what the service provider's role will be in terms of project planning and staffing (of all elements, including for test administration);
- identification of test development and analysis requirements, including results processing/management, and service provider expectations;
- requirements for test delivery, including registration of test-takers, scheduling of assessments, arrangement for and operation of test sites (including contracting for test centres);
- requirements for program security, including development and implementation of an overall security plan; and

- requirements for a communications plan during the program operation..

Note: specific details of some of these key deliverables are found in the following sections.

Section 2. The client should provide a complete written description of how the bidder's proposal should be written, formatted, packaged and delivered.

- 2.1 Sections of the RFP intended as background information or general descriptions should be distinguished from sections of the RFP that require responses from the bidder.
- 2.2 If the client intends to have sections of the RFP to which a response is required copied into the proposal so that those copied sections precede each response, that format should be specified. If two-proposal forms are required (Technical and Financial), applicable procedures along with standardized forms should be set forth.
- 2.3 If the client requires key questions to be answered by the bidder, those questions should be specified in the RFP.
- 2.4 If number of pages and page layout of the proposal (margins, line spacing, fonts and type sizes, page numbering, use of hyperlinked cross-references, etc.) are important to the client, they should be specified.
- 2.5 Whether the proposal should be bound into single binder, or multiple binders, and whether these binders should be included in the same shipping boxes or packaged in different shipping boxes should be specified, as well as the number of copies to be included.
- 2.6 Delivery date and time, the person to whom the shipping boxes should be addressed, the address where boxes should be shipped, and any other instructions for identifying how a responsive bid should be sent to the client.
- 2.7 If electronic submission of the proposal is allowed or required, the client should provide detailed instructions and support for uploading all files.
- 2.8 If bidders are permitted to submit joint bids, then that statement and related information required under those circumstances need to be set forth.

Section 3. The client should have a process that allows bidders to submit questions about the RFP. These questions should enable both RFP authors and bidders to clarify the meaning, intent, and requirements of the RFP.

- 3.1 Questions should be solicited early in the RFP process and responses to questions should be posted for all bidders to have access according to the established RFP schedule.
- 3.2 Time should be built into the proposal process to allow for follow-up questions after the

first round of questions and answers.

Section 4. Specifications for assessment components or program designs should be described in the RFP as completely as possible. Much of this information will come from the client's evaluations and analyses of any current existing program, if one exists.

- 4.1 Specifications for a new assessment should be compared and contrasted with those for the current assessment, when practical and feasible.
- 4.2 Specifications for a new assessment should include material on how universal design principles are to be implemented into the assessment development process, along with the client's accommodation policy.
- 4.3 If a proposed assessment builds upon (i.e., is relevant to and must be interoperable with) one that currently exists, test specifications for the existing assessment should be available to all bidders either within the RFP or by links to a website where the relevant documents exist.
- 4.4 All important test development specifications should be provided to prospective bidders, including:
 - the number of expected test-takers;
 - number of concurrent test takers for technology-based assessments;
 - the required number of operational test questions per content area test, or by reporting category and, if available, the number of existing useable test questions available by content area, reporting category, and question type;
 - the number of unique forms per administration per year by mode, including breach forms;
 - the types of questions to be used within each test;
 - specifications and examples of electronic data exchange formats (e.g., flat files, XML) to evaluate test question portability;
 - computing platforms and types of devices that are to be supported;
 - specifications for and examples of item stimuli (e.g., reading passage, graphs, maps, laboratory setup description, video or animation) and question sets (i.e., multiple items associated to one or more stimuli);
 - procedures for how new test questions are to be field tested;
 - frequency and method for refreshing and releasing test questions, including the method of publication for technology-enhanced questions;
 - psychometric approach to test question calibration, scaling, and forms equating;
 - design of test booklets and answer documents or electronic delivery design including fixed form (with or without sealed sections), computer adaptive, hybrid etc.;
 - security requirements for test materials and test sites; and
 - scoring requirements for machine scoring, human scoring (e.g., centre-based or distributed scoring), artificial intelligence scoring, or any combination.

- 4.5 Specifications and scope for retesting/rescores and appeals (e.g., maximum number or percentage) and examples of individual and group score reports.
- 4.6 If the client wishes that the successful bidder suggest new or specific approaches for any part of the design or implementation of a new assessment, this aspect of the bid should be stated expressly.
- 4.7 Question specifications, test specifications, a materials list and specifications, scoring specifications, accommodations policy, retest policy, reporting specifications, and the client's requirements regarding planning, scheduling, and program management, should all be addressed within the RFP in as much detail as possible.
- 4.8 The number of operational test questions and anchor or linking questions per form should be given if the procuring entity has already planned these details.
- 4.9 Data integrity and data quality requirements, including the need for backup and restoration of data, offsite archiving of important paper and electronic records, and disaster recovery and business continuity (including insurance requirements), should be specified by the client.

Section 5. The RFP should specify, where applicable, the numbers of selected-response questions, constructed-response questions (brief and extended), gridded-response questions, essay questions, technology-enhanced questions, and associated classifications (e.g., depth of knowledge, taxonomies, linguistic difficulty level) necessary to cover the appropriate assessment content, and how any test question required by the program pool will operate.

- 5.1 For assessments used in certification/licensure programs, the content should be valid for all topics and levels necessary for a person demonstrating mastery to be qualified for the certificate, credential or license.
- 5.2 For traditional educational assessment programs, the content should be sufficient to cover all content areas (e.g., language arts/reading, mathematics, writing, science) as required by national educational requirements.
- 5.3 For assessments measuring language proficiency, the content should be sufficient to cover all requirements for assessing proficiency in any context it arises (e.g., certification, educational mastery, job relatedness).
- 5.4 For assessments used in occupational settings, the content must reflect conformity with all appropriate national laws and regulations (e.g., equal employment and fairness requirements, such as questions being job related)
- 5.5 For all content areas, the RFP should specify requirements for use of electronic stimuli, such as simulations and other multimedia, in support of technology-enhanced items.

- 5.6 For all content uses, the RFP should specify requirements for handling the test question pool, including how questions are re-used and retired from use.
- 5.7 Where the client is providing its own content, the RFP should specify how that content is to be provided to the service provider, whether the service provider is required to conduct any analyses on the content, and how the client-owned content is to be used within the testing system to be administered by the service provider.

Section 6. The composition and types of meetings for review committees and other review groups, if any, should be specified in the RFP.

- 6.1 The number and different types of persons (e.g., subject matter experts, technical experts) who will populate each review committee, and other groups to be included (e.g., coordinators, technology coordinators, test proctors), should be specified.
- 6.2 The number of meetings for each review committee or group and the duration of each meeting should be specified. If virtual, electronic meetings are desired or allowed, requirements should be stated, such as central location, regional location(s), all virtual, etc., with the number of computer and telephone connections needed.
- 6.3 The successful service provider's responsibility, if any, for handling the review committee process (e.g., paying per diem amounts to each attendee, supplying food and/or refreshments or lodging, or paying honoraria), must be specified.
- 6.4 The number and types of successful service provider staff who will either lead or provide support for each committee or group, if any, must be specified.

Section 7. The measurement model for the assessment should be specified in the RFP.

- 7.1 Special requirements for verifying calibration, scaling, and equating of test questions and forms should be specified in detail.
- 7.2 A technical specification should be included to indicate the level of detail that the client requires of a bidder/service provider.

Section 8. Specifications for system and program interoperability should be described in the RFP.

- 8.1 The client should evaluate interoperability needs prior to or during the RFP writing process in order to disclose fully such needs, inasmuch as interoperability considerations may impact the ability of a bidder to address other requirements of an RFP.
- 8.2 Any pre-existing interoperability plans, lists of standards used, including any data interoperability standards used (e.g. the Question and Test Interoperability [QTI] Specification), or requirements from previous program systems (e.g., hardware, software, networks), should be identified in the RFP, as well as any requirements for transitioning from an existing system to one being newly proposed.

- 8.3 Industry standards, including new or altered standards or versions of standards, and specific components required between a bidder's system and the client's systems should be specified.
- 8.4 If the client has not included any interoperability specifications, and if the RFP allows for the bidder to provide unsolicited information, the bidder should describe the benefits the client would expect to obtain from system and program interoperability (e.g., efficiencies in operation, facilitation in transitioning between vendors).

Section 9. The RFP should include security specifications for all elements of the assessment program, and any related client expectations for how a bidder will meet those requirements.

- 9.1 When appropriate, the client should provide a copy of an existing security plan already in use on the program, including for test development procedures. At a minimum, the client should identify specific procedures on which each bidder is to submit information, including at least the following:
- handling security involving the use of third parties to the contract;
 - training and sharing training materials;
 - securing materials during the transfer (through physical or electronic means) between any two locations;
 - securing materials during any contracted services (e.g., question writing, test administration, scoring);
 - storage of and access to test materials and test results, whether in physical documents or databases and reporting systems, if they are housed, stored, or hosted at the third party's site(s);
 - retrieval or disposition (i.e., deletion and/or destruction) of secure materials at the third party's site(s); and
 - obtaining and managing security, nondisclosure, or confidentiality agreements for all personnel who will have access to secure materials.
- 9.2 The client should request that the bidder address proposed procedures and rules it would use to secure all computer systems related to the program, including managing access to Internet connectivity on computers used for test development activities, delivery of assessments, administration of the assessment, or for exchanging or accessing data and information, whether such connectivity is required at the facilities of the client, the service provider, or a third party (including all test sites).
- 9.3 The RFP should request that the bidder provide information on its proposed method(s) to secure electronic transfer of test materials and information (e.g., use of industry standard encryption methods for data exchange).
- 9.4 The RFP should request that the bidder provide information on the proposed procedures to make and keep facilities secure. These procedures should include the use of:

- physical access control and security requirements in accordance with national or local guidelines (e.g., control of weapons, etc.);
- access control and security requirements for systems within a facility;
- identification of employees and visitors;
- if facilities include test centres, the procedures for setting up test administration sessions and authentication and/or identification of test takers; and
- processes for security enforcement activities and audits.

9.5 The RFP should request information on proposed procedures and rules for the secure administration of the assessment.

Section 10. The RFP should include all requirements related to test delivery and administration, including for the provision and operation of test sites.

10.1 The RFP should provide relevant requirements for scheduling (e.g., dates, windows), announcement protocols, and registration of test takers for assessments, including the method of registration (e.g., online, offline) and test taker payment arrangements (e.g., will the service provider collect fees, and if so, any required payment features, and other related information such as refunds or retesting), the number of test sites (or web-based administrations), service support requirements (e.g., help desk for client and/or test takers), and site capacity requirements.

10.2 The RFP should provide details on required test delivery software (including security requirements).

10.3 The RFP should detail staffing requirements for the test administration (e.g., site supervisors, administrators, proctors, technical personnel), as well as any staff training requirements.

10.4 For the delivery of assessments in occupational settings, the client should reference ISO 10667, or, if the client is not relying on ISO 10667, it should provide alternate procedures for the delivery of these assessments in the RFP.

10.5 The RFP should provide details on its expectations for ownership of all software and hardware to be provided by the service provider (e.g., if the procuring entity expects the service provider to modify software that would then be owned by the procuring entity).

Section 11. The RFP should include all requirements for reporting scores to test takers, as well as for data management associated with scoring and reporting.

11.1 If on demand scoring is required, the RFP should detail those requirements; if other scoring parameters are to be used, they should be identified. Reporting requirements that impact data management and use should be set forth in the RFP.

11.2 Steps in the collection and management of data, which will vary depending upon

infrastructure and capacity, should be identified in the RFP.

11.3 The RFP needs to establish applicable rules, procedures and any communication plan requirements in order to assure data quality, security, and management.

11.4 Procedures enabling data interoperability in managing data throughout the assessment program need to be included in the RFP.

Section 12. Each bidder will be responsible for producing a work schedule that will result in timely and accurate deliverables. To accomplish this, the RFP must provide, to the extent such information is available, a skeleton of the schedule, including consulting services and activities performed by third-party service providers, with critical dates. Among the information that should be included are the following:

- approximate meeting dates of committee or other groups;
- dates when materials must be delivered to test sites;
- administration dates (or windows) during the year or contract period; and
- dates when test-taker score report results need to be delivered to or electronically posted or available for distribution to designated recipients.

If penalties or liquidated damages will be assessed for failure to meet the schedule or if the deliverables do not meet the requirements, penalties or liquidated damage amounts must be clearly communicated and if possible, specified.

Section 13. The RFP cost proposal will provide a standard document format that all bidders must use to display their costs.

13.1 Prior to publication of the RFP, the client should consider key information about costs that it needs for decision making, and design the cost proposal document accordingly. The client's cost proposal forms should:

- be electronic (or presented in hard copy in the manner otherwise designated by the client);
- be formatted as a standardized cost submission spreadsheet;
- be at a level of detail that allows for a comprehensive review of costs (e.g., unit, service, total);
- allow for cost elements that may be subject to adjustments;
- allow for elements that the client may purchase individually or on an optional basis;
- specify cost/budget limits if applicable; and
- contain accurate formulas.

13.2 If the unit price rather than the total price is required or allowed, there should be an explanation of how prices will be used and over what period of time they are required to be held constant.

13.3 The client should specify the key cost drivers (e.g., services for base bid versus

options, expected number of test takers, delivery model, psychometric model), including the minimum and maximum, so that comparable prices will be given by each bidder.

- 13.4 When appropriate, cost proposal forms should allow for fixed and variable unit costing.
- 13.5 The client should specify what financial information it requires about the bidder (e.g., annual filed statements, proof of insurance/bonding requirements).

Section 14. Existing procurement laws must guide the use of third-party service providers. The RFP should specify any requirements related to responsibility for third-party or subcontracted service providers, including required third parties to be included, flow-down contractual responsibilities, approval of third-party service providers prior to use or change, or other similar requirements.

Section 15. The RFP should specify with reasonable detail the ownership of all item content, item data, test results, test-taker data, and related systems developed during the contract period.

Section 16. The RFP should specify with reasonable detail the method and criteria that the client will use to evaluate the proposals and/or its various components (e.g., technical and financial proposals, management plan, staffing, cost) to arrive at its decision. The RFP must comply with all applicable procurement laws.

- 16.1 If award tender criteria are used, each activity and/or criteria should be assigned a number of points or percentage of weighting, which should be disclosed to each bidder.
- 16.2 If another methodology is to be employed by the client, it should be explained in sufficient detail so that each bidder knows how the client intends to evaluate the bid and award the contract.
- 16.3 If the procuring entity wants to impose other qualifications (e.g., prior experience, number of tests administered, period of time in business), those requirements should be fully articulated, they should be measurable factors directly related to the service provider's performance criteria, and they should not be used by the procuring entity to restrict an inclusive bidding process or to erect artificial barriers that eliminate otherwise qualified service providers from bidding.

Section 17. The RFP should specify the process by which bidders can protest the award decision and specify the procedures that will be applicable to any protest