

Making the Call: Idaho's Unique RFI Process



One often-mentioned form of market research is the request for information (RFI)¹, but whether and when to use this process depends on the specific needs of the contract. The Idaho State Division of Purchasing (DOP) overhauled its RFI process in 2022 to make it more efficient and useful. A recent RFI for a cooperative contract with NASPO ValuePoint for medical supplies demonstrates that the process can be an important tool for procurement officers. States seeking to integrate this RFI process may benefit from Idaho's lessons, but they should first consider several factors specific to their organizations.

Background on the Cooperative Contract

Prior to the 2022 overhaul, the RFI process had long been a source of frustration for the DOP. Previously, the state would ask suppliers to submit written responses to questions about the medical supplies industry, placing an emphasis on historical data. That process created confusion as suppliers often responded with hundreds of pages, many of which read like sales pitches. It also disincentivized some responses from suppliers with limited staff resources or who might not wish to submit written information that could be subject to public records laws.²



The state then developed a “help me help you” solution with a transformational revamp of its RFI process. RFIs now provide limited information about the upcoming project and do not ask for written responses. Rather, the RFI template seeks suppliers who are willing to sign up for virtual meetings that last up to one hour.

The process asks what information the state could provide suppliers that would help them effectively respond to requests for proposals (RFPs), rather than focusing on what suppliers may offer the state.

The DOP recently partnered with NASPO ValuePoint in developing an RFP as the lead on a cooperative contract for medical supplies. NASPO ValuePoint had not previously administered a shared contract for medical supplies, creating a need for market information. With Idaho as the lead state on the contract, the state and NASPO ValuePoint conducted Idaho's innovative RFI process. The RFI document provided a list of 30 commonly purchased items as a starter — including emergency carts, ambulatory products, IV supplies, and diabetic products — though it encouraged suppliers to recommend more items. From there, the DOP and NASPO ValuePoint relied on industry suppliers to fill in any blanks or unknowns, particularly regarding needed categories and supplies.

¹ National Association of State Procurement Officials (NASPO), “NASPO Procurement Glossary,” accessed March 4, 2026, <https://www.naspo.org/glossary/>. A tool that can be used to gather information before preparing a solicitation for formal competition.

² NASPO, “2022 Cronin Submission Booklet,” 11-13, accessed December 2025, https://cms.naspo.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/2022-Cronin-ebook_FINAL.pdf.

How It Worked

Supplier meetings were limited to the first five organizations that respond to the RFI. The state estimated an 80% overlap in answers provided by the suppliers who respond. Following a brief introduction to the company from the supplier for context, state staff asked the following questions, with the first two being the most important. Suppliers offered a variety of responses.

- **What is the most critical information for the state to provide about current conditions?**
- **What is the most critical condition for the state to provide about future state requirements?**
- **Who are the most critical 3-5 personnel from the supplier side for the success of a program?**
- **What would a good cost proposal look like?**
- **How long do you need to put a proposal together?**
- **Is there anything in the industry that would make the proposal too restrictive?**
- **Does anything else come to mind?**

Question 1 answers included:

- Specifics on sizes, quantities, locations, timelines, and other requirements of suppliers
- Whether the RFP should provide specific brand names or just product descriptions
- How to effectively categorize items

Question 2 responses included:

- Technology, sustainability, and supplier diversity requirements
- Allowances for pricing tiers
- "Brand name or equivalent" product specifications

Because the process remains relatively uncommon, state staff on the virtual calls provided suppliers with an overview of the process and its aims. Staff sometimes asserted early in the call that they were not looking for a "sales pitch" and that the call would not affect bid decisions, ideally allowing for more detailed and accurate responses from suppliers. Though meetings included a pre-determined set of questions, the call was not particularly formal. For instance, suppliers who meet with the state later than other suppliers sometimes answered questions stemming from the previous calls.

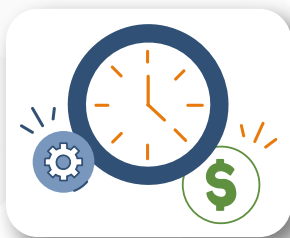
The five meetings took place over three days. DOP and NASPO ValuePoint staff explained Idaho's RFI process for suppliers while taking care not to predict what the RFP process would look like. They presented the questions in the same order to each supplier, sometimes adding the clarifying questions at the end. Some meetings — particularly those in which only company executives attended from the supplier side — elicited more "sales pitch" responses, especially on the question about time needed to respond to the RFP. Frontline employees, such as account representatives, often had knowledge of the current market and provided deeper responses to questions. Following the meetings, DOP and NASPO ValuePoint organized an "industry meeting". The industry meeting was open to all potential suppliers, not just those 5 from the original meeting, and it brought the suppliers into the same virtual room for follow-up questions on topics like delivery schedules, emergency contingencies, and back orders. While the RFP was almost complete before the industry meeting, DOP and NASPO ValuePoint sought to refine certain sections, including the scope of work, based on new information obtained.

A Timeline of the RFI Process



Why It Works for Idaho

In a submission for the 2022 George Cronin Awards for Procurement Excellence,³ Idaho reported enhanced efficiency and cost savings from increased competition and saved staff time. The state estimates that a traditional RFI process would consume roughly 30 hours of staff time over 12 weeks, whereas the new process requires about 15 hours over 7 weeks. This represents a 66% decrease in staff time and 42% decrease in duration. Based on hourly rates, the state estimates a savings of \$1,400 per RFI, adding up to tens of thousands of dollars per year.⁴



Time saved:

Traditional RFI Process: **30 hours** of staff time over **12 weeks**
New Process: **15 hours** over **12 weeks**

Costs saved:

- **66 % decrease** in staff time
- **42% decrease** in duration
- **\$1,400 in savings** per RFI

Considerations Before Implementing This Process

Idaho has enjoyed clear benefits from the new process, but states considering a similar model should take several points into consideration:

Formal vs. Informal

When would this RFI be beneficial instead of internet research, less formal conversations with suppliers, or inquiries to neighboring states? Could the information be covered in a business review meeting, which is used to gather updated market research on a recurring basis?

Business review meetings⁵ may also inform whether an RFI is necessary for a future procurement in that industry.

Commodities vs. Services

RFIs tend to be used more often for services, particularly complex ones. They are also useful for new contracts, including for commodities like medical supplies, where there is a lack of historical spend data and existing market research.

³NASPO, "2022 Cronin Submission Booklet," 11-13.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Cronin Awards 2025: Expanding Outreach for Scalable Success: Multi-Supplier Business Reviews," NASPO, February 12, 2026, 1:00:22, <https://youtu.be/1f0ayuxxGVk>.



Preventing Biases

State staffers should guard against biases, including subconscious ones, based on suppliers who provide more information or make positive impressions on calls.



Supplier Staff on Call

While company heads often attend the meetings, better information may come from frontline staff, who have firsthand knowledge of the goods or services being procured.



Supplier Participation

Which suppliers would have the resources or incentive to attend calls? How many suppliers should participate? Should suppliers offer a brief presentation at the start of the meeting, or would a more loosely organized conversation be preferable?



State Laws, Rules, and Practices

While the RFI process is not required or significantly regulated in Idaho, other states might differ.



Keeping Records

Some states might prefer that suppliers offer a brief slideshow presentation or handout at the start of the meeting, based on listed questions sent ahead of time.



Scheduling

How many meetings does the state have time to host on this project? To prevent significant delays, states should incorporate RFIs into detailed project timelines.

Conclusion

For states that understand and can account for these considerations, the Idaho RFI process is likely a strong fit. The medical supplies RFI illustrates that the process continues to operate as intended years after launch and can be tailored to a specific state's process and needs. RFIs, once a source of stress for the DOP and suppliers alike, engage suppliers more effectively and efficiently. States that seek to implement a similar process would have another tool in their market research toolbox.

Additional Resources

[2022 George Cronin Awards for Procurement Excellence](#): For more background on the development of Idaho's RFI process, see the state's 2022 Cronin Awards for Procurement Excellence submission on pages 11-19. The submission includes the state's RFI template.

[State of Idaho DOP Summary of Medical Supplies RFI](#)

[State of Idaho DOP Procurement Desk Manual](#)

[State of Georgia RFI Template](#)

[Commonwealth of Massachusetts RFI Template](#)

[State of Washington RFI Template](#)

[Partners for Public Good: How to Write a request for Information \(RFI\) That Vendors Want to Respond To](#)