

RFP# 15185
Merit Peer Review Services for
Scientific and Education Research Applications

Questions and Answers

Questions received by deadline of April 4, 2014

Q 1.

For both component A and B, based on current estimates, investigators from approximately 40 institutions may be eligible to apply for funding. The number of applications received in response to each RFA will vary; to date, this figure has ranged from 1 to 50. What is the average number of applications received broken down by RFA type (education versus research)?

A 1.

The number of applications received in response to each RFA will vary; to date, this figure has ranged from 1 to 50. The number of applications submitted will vary by type of RFA (See RFP section B). Historically, more applications are received in response to biomedical research RFAs (20 – 50) than for education research RFAs (1-10) in either breast cancer or spinal cord injury.

Q 2.

The bidder will identify and designate a single experienced staff member as overall Project Manager of this project who will dedicate as much time on this project as needed to ensure its successful completion. This is a Firm Fixed Price contract. Please provide an assumption of the number of hours per calendar year for the Program Manager.

A 2.

An assumption contained in the question is incorrect. As shown in Attachment 3, the tiered, fixed prices quoted by the bidder are to review the various ranges of applications (to be paid on a non-cumulative basis). However, the overall contract value is not fixed but rather will be based on the number of Peer Review Cycles, types of Review Meetings and number of applications reviewed for each Peer Review Cycle, over the life of the contract.

Overall, this variable is controlled by the bidder. It is likely to be dependent on the approach described as well as the qualifications and experience of the individual selected as Program Manager.

Q 3.

Any change to the Project Manager position must have the prior approval of NYSDOH program staff. This decision must be at the discretion of the bidding organization, not the NYSDOH. Please provide guidance regarding this requirement

and the development of a firm fixed price estimate, as staffing factors into the estimate.

A 3.

While the contractor may replace the Project Manager, NYSDOH will approve/disapprove the Project Manager prior to the Contractor assigning the individual to the NYSDOH contract. NYSDOH program staff must ensure that any changes by the contractor to the Project Manager position during the contract term result in the selection of an individual with substantially comparable or better qualifications and experience than the original personnel described in the bid (see RFP section C.2).

Q 4.

Please confirm that this RFP is regarding independent scientific and technical peer review.

A 4.

The purpose of this Request for Proposals (RFP) entitled “Merit Peer Review Services for Scientific and Education Research Applications” is to secure the services of a qualified and responsible entity for the purpose of conducting independent scientific and technical merit review of applications for funding through the New York State Department of Health” (See RFP Introduction).

Q 5.

A NYSDOH staff member will be designated as the primary contact for the contractor. Has this individual been identified? If yes, who will be the primary NYSDOH contact?

A 5.

The successful bidder will be notified of the primary contact with the NYSDOH when the award is made.

Q 6.

The maximum number of applications per reviewer that NYSDOH will accept is six (6). There will be three (3) reviewers per application, including at least one breast cancer survivor or advocate. For developing component A cost estimates, if we assume a maximum of 50 applications * 3 reviewers per application, this results in 150 assignments. 150 assignments divided by 6 applications per reviewer would result in a 25 person panel, 8 of which are consumer reviewers, to review 50 applications. Please provide guidance as to how the contractor should estimate for this Firm Fixed price work for scientific expertise that would certainly be required for applications that do not fit within the expertise of the recruited panel members.

A 6.

The NYSDOH will not comment on a bidder’s unique approach, projected staffing levels or the resulting number of application(s) assigned per reviewer, beyond the parameters set forth in the RFP.

The contractor’s approach, qualifications and experience will guide the recruitment of appropriate panel(s). The contractor will identify sufficient

numbers of highly competent and experienced researchers, physicians and others as appropriate to the subject of the RFA to serve as peer review panel members.... For both components, the vast majority of peer review panel members will have an understanding of peer review principles and experience in rigorous scientific or education research peer review and in managing competitive, federally-funded or state-funded research projects. (RFP section C.2.a)

Q 7.

Will consumer reviewers need additional training, orientations or separate material development (e.g. handbook for peer review, etc.)?

A 7.

For Component A only, one of the three recruited reviewers will be breast cancer survivors or advocates who are identified and recruited based on their understanding of basic scientific or education research (RFP section C.2.a). Training, orientation or separate material development for any reviewer should be described in the bidder's approach

Q 8.

Bidders have been informed that Component B's costs should be the same as component A. Are bidders then to assume that 3 reviewers will be assigned to each Spinal Cord application, and that one of those 3 reviewers will be an advocate for spinal cord research?

A 8.

The RFP states that 3 reviewers will be assigned to both breast cancer and spinal cord injury applications. It does not specify that one of the three reviewers for spinal cord injury research must be an advocate; however, the cost assumption should be the same (RFP section C.2.a).

Q 9.

The contractor will provide honoraria/payment to the reviewers at the rate of \$250 per review panel day for each scheduled meeting day. Please clarify that reviewers are to be assigned 6 applications for review and participate in a 2 day meeting and then receive a total of \$500, which equates to \$83 per application reviewed?

A 9.

The number of applications assigned per reviewer is dependent on the number received for review and the bidder's approach, to a maximum of six (6) per reviewer. Honoraria/payment is to the reviewers at the rate of \$250 per review panel day for each scheduled meeting day (RFP section C.2.a).

Q 10.

Is there a pre-meeting honorarium in addition?

A 10.

There is no pre-meeting honorarium.

Q 11.

NYSDOH will have final approval on the selection of peer review panel members and retains the right to reject panel members. In the event of the NYSDOH rejecting panel members, what constitutes that decision process and timeline? Is there extra time allotted for this process in addition to the 3 weeks allotted for recruitment and 3-4 weeks allotted for pre-meeting review?

A 11.

Within one week of the application due date, those applications that meet the minimum administrative requirements (Pass/Fail) will be made available to the contractor electronically. The review panel will convene to discuss the assigned applications within eight (8) weeks after the application due date (RFA section C.2.a). There will be no additional time allotted for panel recruitment.

Q 12.

Please clarify that this RFP is for independent scientific and technical peer review.

A 12.

See Q&A 4

Q. 13

How will the contractor recruit additional expertise under a Firm fixed price contract?

A. 13

The contractor's approach, qualifications and experience will guide the recruitment of appropriate panel(s). The contractor will identify sufficient numbers of highly competent and experienced researchers, physicians and others as appropriate to the subject of the RFA to serve as peer review panel members (RFP section C.2.a).

Q 14.

Does the NYSDOH have compliance requirements in place, and if so, can these be made available to bidders in order to assess labor hours needed for compliance check?

A 14.

The specific RFAs have not yet been issued. Each RFA will address compliance requirements and any associated penalties. Bidders may inspect the Application Checklists of previously issued RFAs to gain an understanding of the types of compliance requirements that were in place in past procurements (RFP section B, Table 1).

Q 15.

The review panel will convene 8 weeks after application due date. Please confirm contractor will have a minimum of 7 weeks to receive applications and recruit

qualified individuals so that subject matter experts are given appropriate time to review applications and submit pre-meeting critiques (minimum of 3-4 weeks prior to meeting).

A 15.

An assumption contained in the question is incorrect, as stated in RFP Section C.2.b. the review panel will convene to discuss the assigned application within eight (8) weeks after the application due date.

Those applications that meet the minimum administrative requirements (Pass/Fail) will be made available to the contractor electronically. It is the intention of the NYSDOH to provide the electronic applications to the contractor approximately one (1) week after the Application Due Date specified in the RFA, which would allow the contractor approximately seven (7) weeks for the recruiting of qualified individuals. However, these anticipated timeframes are not an explicit guarantee and the contractor will be expected to recruit the review panel and convene to discuss the assigned applications within eight (8) weeks after the application due date. All assigned reviewers will be required to submit their draft critiques and preliminary scores in writing to the contractor prior to the peer review meeting (RFP section C.2.a).

Q16.

Please confirm that there are no Letters of Intent received in advance of full applications.

A 16.

In the most recent procurements for breast cancer and spinal cord injury research, Letters of Intent have been optional. Letter of Intent that are received will be provided to the contractor after the due date listed on the front of the RFA.

Q17.

In addition, the contractor will provide other reports or data requested by NYSDOH on an as-needed basis to fulfill the requirements of the board regarding award recommendations and reports required of all entities contracting with New York State. Please provide guidance as to how this is achievable under a Firm Fixed price contract.

A 17.

The bidder should also have access to a sufficient number of staff, who have expertise in all aspects of peer review administration, to fulfill the tasks of the project (and as many as 75 applications per Peer Review Cycle), including: information technology; database management; computer programming;... scientific writing and editing; contract management; and fiscal operations (RFP section C.1.a). This RFP in total (including attachments and appendices) represents the reports that are known to be required at this time.

Q 18. The bidder should have staff who possess appropriate scientific credentials; a record of academic publications within the pertinent disciplines. Does this mean contractor staff are required to have publications in the field of spinal cord injury or breast cancer?

A 18.

The RFP sentence preceding the citation in the question above reads, “The bidder *should have* access to a sufficient number of staff who have experience in biomedical or health-related research and have demonstrated scientific excellence through their own research publications (emphasis added; RFP section C.1.a). While a high level of expertise in biomedical research and health-related research among staff working on the contracted project is desirable, all staff employed by the contractor are not required to have a record of publications in their disciplines.

Q 19.

In the event of an in-person peer review panel meeting, the contractor will also be responsible for the selection of the meeting location as well as travel, meal, refreshment and hotel arrangements for meeting attendees. All travel, food and lodging costs should be included in the bid proposal. Bid prices quoted must be an all-inclusive price which shall include all costs such as salaries, travel, lodging, and ancillary costs such as printing, secretarial services, data entry, computer support, communications, recordkeeping and reporting, and inflationary calculations for salaries, benefits and other items. Please indicate how it is possible using a firm fixed price contract to predict travel costs in advance of recruitment when exact numbers of applications and number of reviewers needed is unknown.

A 19.

Bidders are expected to be able to estimate this by drawing on their expertise and experience. Further, per Attachment 3, there are two levels of In-Person Review Meetings assumed. The bidder should utilize the parameters within the two levels to ascertain the requested costs.