

**New York State Department of Health
Merit Peer Review Services for Scientific and Education Research Applications
RFP #: 20025**

Questions and Answers April 19, 2019

Question Number	Corresponding RFP Section	Bidder's Question	Answer
1	General	Can you please provide the name of the firm currently performing these services?	American Institute of Biological Sciences
2	General	Is it permissible to provide the chair and reviewers with electronic/soft copies only of applications and review materials? Or should contractor's budget to print and mail hardcopy materials?	Yes, it is permissible to provide the chair and reviewers with electronic/soft copies of applications and review materials provided it is done in accordance with the security requirements specified in Section 4.8 of the RFP (Security).
3	General	Will NYDOH provide a historical list of Chairpersons and reviewers to the contractor?	No.
4	4.2 Staffing (Pages 6-8 of RFP)	<p>Regarding: "Staff member(s) assigned to manage the peer review process must have scientific research experience beyond the postdoctoral level."</p> <p>Is this a new qualification for a Program Manager?</p> <p>a. Can work experience be taken into account in lieu of scientific research experience beyond postdoctoral level?</p>	<p>See Amendment #1.</p> <p>For RFP # 20025, the Department officially modifies Section 4.2, Staffing. This subsection shall read: For each of the research boards, the contractor will identify and designate an experienced staff member as an overall manager of this contract who will dedicate as much time as needed to ensure the final deliverable is received, reviewed and approved by the DOH in the</p>

			timeframes specified. A single person may be identified and made responsible for the work associated with more than one (1) board or the Contractor may utilize more than one staff member.
5	4.2 Staffing (Pages 6-8 of RFP)	Historically, has the incumbent contractor used a single Overall Manager for all boards or were multiple Overall Managers used?	Historically, multiple Overall Managers have been used.
6	4.2 Staffing (Pages 6-8 of RFP)	Historically, does the Overall Manager attend all in-person panel reviews?	Historically, the Overall Manager attended all in-person panel reviews.
7	4.2 Staffing (Pages 6-8 of RFP)	<p>We respectfully request consideration of the requirement for an Overall Manager, as defined, to be unusually restrictive to the Scope of Work. The requirement artificially limits responsible and qualified peer review offerors to those with a specific peer review and corporate organizational structure and does not increase the level of integrity of the peer review process or the validity and independence of the results.</p> <p>We respectfully request (1) the requirement for an Overall Manager be replaced with a requirement for a Scientific Advisor, a position that does not include the authority to make decisions—in particular financial management and staffing decisions—on behalf of the contractor and (2) we request that the Scientific Review Administrator (SRA) assumes the role of liaison with the NY DOH staff to ensure completion of all tasks required for this contract.</p>	<p>See Amendment #1.</p> <p>For RFP # 20025, the Department officially modifies Section 4.2, Staffing. This subsection shall read:</p> <p>a) the rank and authority to manage decisions and staffing on behalf of the contractor and to act as liaison with DOH staff to ensure completion of all tasks required for this contract;</p>
8	4.2 Staffing (Pages 6-8 of RFP)	Will NY DOH provide a list of individuals who have served on merit peer review panels to date? Are there limitations on the number of years a reviewer may serve?	No, NYS DOH will not provide a list of individuals that have served on previous merit review panels. Currently there are no limitations on the number of years a reviewer may serve as a peer reviewer, however any of the boards, at their discretion, can impose such limitations.

9	4.3 Pre-Meeting Activities (Page 8 of RFP)	Will NY DOH provide the contractor with reviewer instructions and forms used in prior years as samples?	NYS DOH will provide reviewer instructions and forms to the selected contractor that were created by NYS DOH staff.
10	4.3 Pre-Meeting Activities (Page 9 of RFP)	You state that “Instructions will include the use of tools provided by the contractor (e.g., web portals and software) to accurately document application evaluations and scores” How are application evaluations and scores collected by the contractor presently?	The current contractor has a proprietary software application that captures reviewer evaluations and scores.
11	4.3 Pre-Meeting Activities (Page 9 of RFP)	“All assigned reviewers will be required to submit their draft critiques and preliminary adjectival scores in writing to the contractor prior to the peer review meeting.” Should they be able to amend these drafts?	Yes, the drafts may be amended after peer review discussions of each application.
12	4.6 Meeting Activities (Page 10 of RFP)	Will prior orientation materials be provided to the contractor upon award?	NYS DOH will provide the selected contractor with orientation materials prior to the review for each procurement.
13	4.6 Meeting Activities (Page 10 of RFP)	Are all ODCs considered allowable pass-through expenditures? If not, can you please identify what ODCs should be included in our per application costs?	Assuming ODC’s are “other than direct costs,” all ODC’s must be included in the per application cost excluding except the pass-through costs detailed in Section 4.6 of the RFP.
14	4.7 Post-Meeting Activities and Reporting Requirements (Page 11 of RFP)	Regarding the: b. detailed, anonymized, score report of the panel for the application; i. What content is anonymized in the score reports?	The identity of the reviewers.
15	4.7 Post-Meeting Activities and Reporting Requirements (Page 11 of RFP)	Regarding the: d. overall summary of the panel discussion of each application discussed by the panel i. Who is responsible for drafting the overall summary report for each application - the chair, reviewers, DOH, or the contractor?	The primary reviewer of the application.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ii. Is the contractor responsible for copy editing or formatting? iii. Should we edit for sensitive and inflammatory comments as well? 	<p>The contractor is responsible for copy editing and formatting.</p> <p>No, we prefer to work with the contractor to address sensitive and inflammatory comments.</p>
16	4.7 Post-Meeting Activities and Reporting Requirements (Page 11 of RFP)	<p>Regarding the: e. evaluative statements (critique) for each RFA-established review criterion from each of the assigned reviewers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Is the contractor responsible for copy editing or formatting? ii. Should we edit for sensitive and inflammatory comments as well? 	<p>The contractor is responsible for copy editing and formatting.</p> <p>No, we prefer to work with the contractor to address sensitive and inflammatory comments.</p>
17	4.7 Post-Meeting Activities and Reporting Requirements (Page 11 of RFP)	<p>Regarding the: f. documentation of any concerns of the peer review panel members regarding: use of human subjects, vertebrate animals and recombinant DNA; overlap of scientific, budget or commitment; and other items identified in the RFA and/or merit review instructions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Who is responsible for drafting this documentation - the chair, reviewers, DOH, or the contractor? ii. Is the contractor responsible for copy editing or formatting? iii. Should we edit for sensitive and inflammatory comments as well? 	<p>The reviewers are responsible for drafting this documentation.</p> <p>The contractor is responsible for copy editing and formatting.</p> <p>No, we prefer to work with the contractor to address sensitive and inflammatory comments.</p>

18	4.7.a Post-Meeting Activities and Reporting Requirements (Page 11 of RFP)	Post-Meeting Activities and Reporting Requirements Please define “penalty points”. How and at what time during the review process are penalty points applied?	Penalty points are applied to an application if the applicant does not use the forms provided or exceed page limits. Penalties are described in detail for each RFA in the “Checklist and Instructions” document. Penalty points may be identified and applied any time before the final deliverable is due.
19	4.9 Transition (Page 12 of RFP)	How many days should a new contractor expect to have to transition-in?	Transition in section 4.9 only refers to transitioning out of contract. It is not expected to have any uncompleted work between contract periods. Anticipate work will commence within 30 days of award and approval of the Office of the State Comptroller.
20	5.4 Payment	<p>The RFP states, “In the event the contractor begins work on a peer review cycle but the decision is made by DOH that the cycle cannot be completed, the contractor may be reimbursed for deliverables and sub-activities described in Attachment B, Section A, if completed to the satisfaction of the Department of Health and the performance of all work set forth in said specifications.”</p> <p>As shown above, the statement includes the word, ‘may’. Has this situation occurred? If yes, for what reason? Also, please identify example situations where the contractor (1) would and (2) would not be paid for project funds expended on deliverables and sub-activities.</p>	This situation has not occurred. The only situation in which we can foresee this circumstance occurring is if NYS DOH decides to withdraw an RFA that has been issued, the contractor would be paid for only those sub-activities completed to the department’s satisfaction.

21	5.5 Minority & Woman-Owned Business Enterprise Requirements	As mentioned in section 5.5 Minority & Woman-Owned Business Enterprise Requirements a goal of 30% of participation is established for MWBE firms. Is this 30% of planned subcontracting or 30% of the overall contract value?	The MWBE goal is based on the overall contract value.
22	5.5 Minority & Woman-Owned Business Enterprise Requirements (Page 14 of RFP)	Assuming our firm is an SBA-certified EDWOSB firm and a VA-certified SWAM; would we meet NUY DOH WBE and MWBE participation requirements for this solicitation? Or must we be certified in the state of NY?	No, your firm must be certified by New York State. Please refer to the following web site for information about becoming a New York State certified MWBE: https://esd.ny.gov/doing-business-ny/mwbe .
23	5.7 Tax Certification	Must a contractor register to collect local sales and compensating use taxes prior to proposal submittal, or can registration be complete upon notification of award, prior to commencement of the contract?	The contractor must complete registration upon notification of award.
24	5.9 Subcontractors	Are all subcontractors and suppliers required to be registered with the New York State certified MWBE's?	No, this is not required unless the expenses of the subcontractor or supplier are being utilized as part of the MWBE requirement of the contract.
25	6.1.H Administrative Proposal References (Attachment 9) (Page 22 of RFP)	Are bidders allowed to use NYSDOH program staff as references?	No.
26	7.0 Proposal Submission (Page 26 of RFP)	May we use 10-point font for tables and graphics?	You may use 10-front for tables and graphics only
27	8.3 Technical Evaluation (Page 28 of RFP)	You state that "Technical Evaluation Committee members will independently score each Technical Proposal that meets the submission requirements of this RFP. The individual Committee Member scores will be averaged to calculate the Technical Score for each responsive Bidder." Can you	The technical factors that will be used to score the technical proposals are outlined in Section 6.2 of the RFP.

		provide additional information on the technical factors that the committee will use to score technical proposals?	
28	Cost (Attachment B)	How would you like bidders to properly estimate costs for items currently not listed in the 6 deliverable products listed in Attachment B?	It is the bidder's responsibility to estimate cost per application based on their chosen method to satisfactorily complete all deliverables.
29	Cost (Attachment B)	How would you recommend that bidders estimate on a per application basis rather than per panel basis for items such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. "Provide an experienced manager who will dedicate as much time as needed to ensure final deliverable is received, reviewed, and approved by the DOH in the timeframe specified"? b. Reviewing RFA content prior to release, communication with NYSDOH staff members on a consistent basis, development of material in support of individual program board meetings, etc.? 	It is the bidder's responsibility to estimate cost per application based on their chosen method to satisfactorily complete all deliverables. NYS DOH makes no assumptions or recommendations other than all costs (other than the allowed pass-through costs itemized per the RFP, page 10) must be included in the bid price.
30	Cost (Attachment B)	How is a bidder to estimate costs for recruitment of experts across all programs when number of reviewers assigned to review proposal(s) differs? For example, 3 reviewers are assigned to review 1 proposal for one program, 2 reviewers are assigned to review for other programs. Depending on number of proposals and expertise required on a panel, this may dictate the need for additional panel members. How will contractor estimate these costs?	Review panel member honoraria, travel, lodging and per-diem are all pass-through costs and would result in no additional expense to the bidder regardless of the number of reviewers. The cost of administering the peer review process should be part of the bidder's per application bid price.
31	Cost (Attachment B)	Would it be fitting to add a separate cost item to reflect a yearly Administrative fee for management, liaison, and	No

		other services indirectly involved prior to and after application(s) review for each program?	
32	Cost (Attachment B)	<p>Will any of the programs require bidders to develop material that is in any way organized differently than the summary statements delivered (e.g., material used for advisory board meetings)?</p> <p>a. If so, what specific format and deliverable(s) are expected, and should this item be added to the deliverable products section in Attachment B?</p>	The only deliverables are outlined in Section 4.1 of the RFP. No additional materials are anticipated.
33	Appendix F	Does NY DOH have a list of approved cloud service providers? If so, please provide a list or link to the approved list.	No
34	Appendix F A.1	Establishing and maintaining physically and logically segregated data in contractor systems, to support General Requirements in Section F, can be expensive to establish and maintain the appropriate technology infrastructure. Would the DEPARTMENT consider systems with shared resources and Role Based Access Control (RBAC) to minimize cost and maximize operational effectiveness? If so, please remove references to Physically and Logically segregated?	The vendor should assume that RBAC is not sufficient and that the Department data should be physically and logically segregated.
35	Appendix F A.1	What is considered DEPARTMENT data? How does the DEPARTMENT classify the research proposal data? Is there any Personally Identifiable Information included in the DEPARTMENT's data? Are the submitted research proposals considered DEPARTMENT data or just the independent review, scoring and narrative of the research proposal?	Department data would be specified in the data use agreement. Appendix F defines data and includes information that is uploaded. Since the research proposals are being provided to the Contractor, as an agent of the Department, then the research proposals would be considered Department data, as well as the independent review, scoring and narrative.

36	Appendix F, Section G	DEPARTMENT Access to data requires the ability to import or export data. Generally, it is bad security practice to grant access to a database directly. Is this requirement at the database level, or can administrative access through the application front-end met this requirement?	The data is the Department's data and the intent is that if the Department need access to the data, the vendor needs to make the data available. This does not imply direct access to the database but could be provided by offering access to the data from the application.
37	Appendix F, Section J	Transfer of DATA requires written authorization. Is written authorization required when moving data to test or development systems for troubleshooting purposes?	Production data should not be used in testing without a specific written business case approved by the Department. If production data is used, access controls, system configurations and logging requirements for production data should be applied to the test environment and testing data deleted when testing is completed or PPSI must be deidentified using the HIPAA privacy standard.
38	Appendix 8	IV. C.2 Our company has one employee who resides in New York State full-time. This individual will not be associated with the NY DOH contract. Does this employee's residence in New York, therefore more than 30 days, require our company to provide payment of disability benefits for all full- and part-time employees under the Disability Benefits Law?	Only if they are working in NYS, from home or the office, for over 30 days in a calendar year they would need NYS disability benefits coverage.