

# Planning and Writing Results-Driven RFPs

Charles Kargman, Nayana Nagapurapu, Greg Wass

**December 14, 2022**



**HARVARD** Kennedy School  
Government Performance Lab

# Presenters



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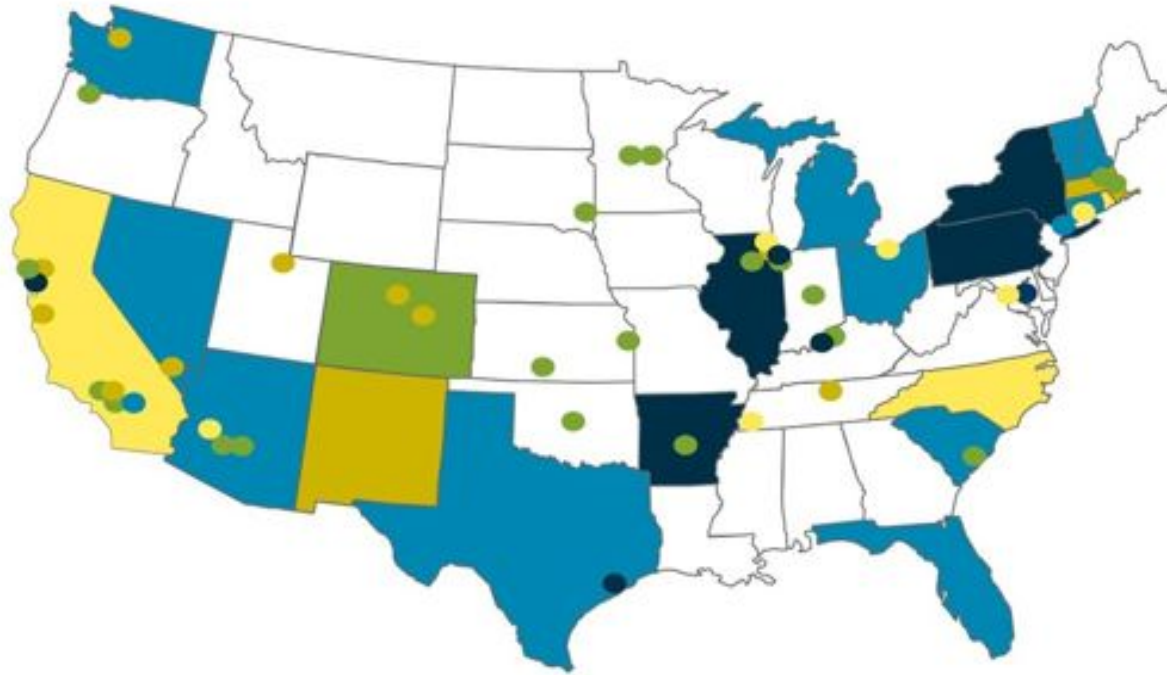


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# HKS Government Performance Lab



**Over 200 projects across 35 states**

- Criminal justice
- Child welfare
- Homelessness & behavioral health
- Workforce development
- Procurement systems

## **GPL Fellows**

Provide hands-on technical assistance

## **Technical Experts**

Offer expert guidance on complex challenges

## **National Network**

Convene state and city innovators

## **Publications**

Spread ideas through policy briefs and tools

# GPL Trainings for RFA Workforce Fellows 2022-23



**Equity in Procurement and Grantmaking**  
October 27, 2022

*How do we center equity in procurement and improve accessibility for small and minority-led organizations?*

**Planning and Drafting Results-Driven RFPs**  
TODAY: December 14, 2022

*How do we write RFPs that root social services in clear goals and performance metrics, yet still encourage vendor innovation?*

**Evaluating Proposals and Project Kickoff**  
February 15, 2023

*How do we award the RFP to the right vendor and establish a productive, collaborative relationship early on?*

**Active Grant Management**  
April 19, 2023

*How do we manage a grant such that we see results and codify best practices?*

October 2022

**GPL Trainings**

April 2023

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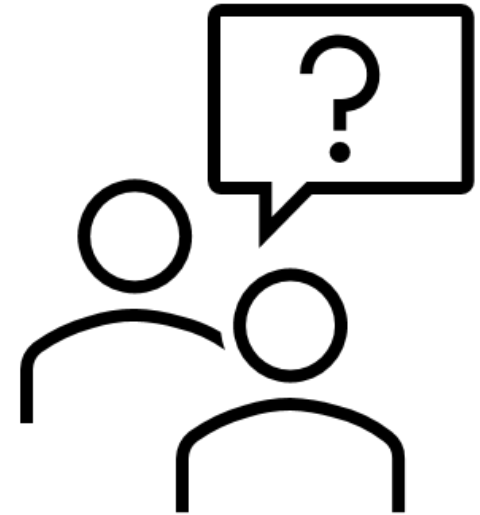
# Agenda

- **RFP Planning: Market Research and Requests for Information (RFIs)** *(15 minutes)*
  - **RFP Drafting: Problem Statement and Goals** *(10 minutes)*
  - **RFP Drafting: Scope of Work** *(10 minutes)*
  - **RFP Drafting: Performance Metrics** *(15 minutes)*
  - **Q&A and next steps** *(10 minutes)*
-

## But first, a Zoom poll.

**What aspect of RFP planning and writing does your jurisdiction find the most challenging?**

- Conducting market research
- Writing goals and problem statements
- Drafting a scope of work
- Identifying performance metrics to track outcomes



# Session objectives

**By the end of today's session, we hope you will be able to:**

1. Understand **the importance of market research** in administering effective, evidence-based procurements and programs.
2. Write **clear, accessible goals and problem statements** that center your RFP on outcomes.
3. Draft **scopes of work (SOWs)** that invite vendor collaboration and innovation.
4. Establish **performance metrics** that make contract management transparent and focused on impact.

***You can workshop RFPs from your own jurisdiction through office hours with GPL staff!***

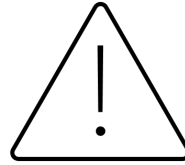
# RFP Planning

*Market Research and RFIs*



# Why do we do market research?

- Learn about solutions and services that you did not know were available.
- More accurate sense of pricing options, more accurate budgeting.
- The better you understand the vendor marketplace, the better you can match your request with what vendors offer.



***That seems like more work – what happens if I don't do any market research? What's the risk?***

- **You receive few or no quality bids** because you didn't know what organizations were out there.
- **You see higher than expected quotes** because bidders raise prices in response to unclear, vague, and/or unreasonable scopes of work (SOWs).
- **Potential vendors see the RFP as a matter of compliance, not collaboration** because you haven't considered what knowledge gaps vendors could address.
- **You can't identify evidence-based practices!**

# What market research should you do before developing your RFP?

## Understand your users



- Who is the **population using your service or product**?
- What qualitative and quantitative data could you collect about **their needs by hearing from users directly**?
- How would users say their needs have changed since you last procured for this service or product?

## Look back at past performance



- What's working and what's not working about how current contractors are providing this service?
- What are **common complaints** from service recipients, program managers, or inspectors/auditors?
- Have contractors had trouble meeting **government staff's expectations**?

## Conduct market research



- What is the **pool of potential contractors** and what can they offer?
- Have any **new solutions** emerged since you last procured for the service or product?
- Which interventions and programs have the most **evidence of impact**?
- Would speaking with peer cities/states, interviewing vendors, or issuing a Request for Information (RFI) or a Concept Paper help you better understand the market or the feasibility of your approach?

# RFIs are one of many tools in the market research toolbox.

Effort

Low

**Internet research** to discover what firms exist and what solutions they offer.

**Academic research literature and expert interviews** to develop evidence base.

**Speaking with associations or peer cities** to understand best practices in contracting for a specific service or product or to identify example RFPs from other jurisdictions.

**Vendor interviews, focus groups, surveys or town halls** to understand what products, services and firms are out there, how they work, and who they could serve.

**Requests for Information (RFIs)** to solicit ideas, solutions and/or recommendations to assist in the development of an RFP.

**Industry days** to seek input concerning current industry practices from members of the vendor community.

**Concept papers** to announce your RFP vision and plan to the vendor community. By pairing with a vendor meeting, you can further explain the new concept or approach you're taking.

**Prototype competitions** with vendors where competing teams develop prototypes during early stages of a project. A "try before you buy."

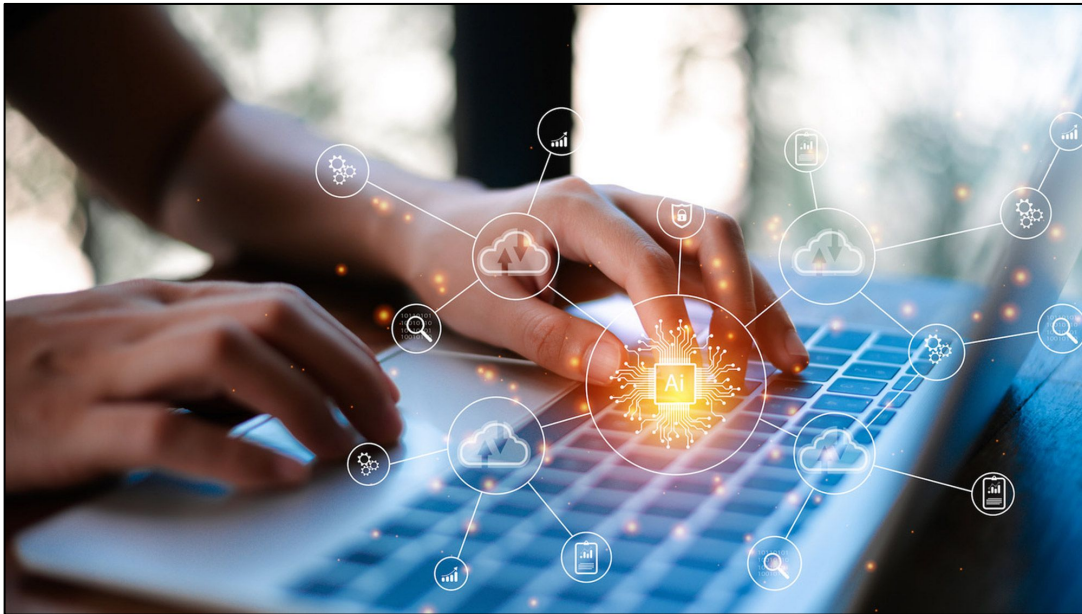
High

# Request for Information (RFI) Basics

- **Purpose:** Obtain valuable insight from vendors and stakeholders before issuing an RFP. Often used to close major information gaps as part of a discovery process.
- **Award:** No contract is awarded from an RFI. A vendor is usually not required to respond to an RFI to be eligible to submit a proposal for a subsequent RFP.
- **Responses:** Responding to an RFI should be a much easier lift for vendors compared to an RFP. It can be simple as a Google Form!
- **Motivation:** Vendors are motivated to offer feedback that might improve the resulting RFP's content/requirements and hope to get on the government's radar.



# Let's say Citylandia wanted to publish an RFP for a digital literacy program. How would you conduct your market research?



**Over the next 5 minutes, discuss in pairs:**

- What are the “unknowns” here?
- What tools, resources, or strategies would you use to determine these unknowns before drafting your RFP?

# RFP Drafting

## *Problem Statement and Goals*

# Characteristics of a Results-Driven RFP

Today's Focus

RFP Section	Characteristic	Key Questions
Introduction/ Overview	A clear <b>problem statement</b> with defined <b>outcome goals</b> and a <b>defined target/user population</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What are you trying to achieve? In what ways do you want to modify the status quo?</i></li> <li>• <i>Who are the intended recipients or users of this program or service? What are their needs?</i></li> </ul>
Scope of Work	<p>A <b>scope of services</b> description that invites innovation</p> <p><b>Performance metrics</b> and a plan for managing performance during the contract term</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What does the vendor need to do to achieve your goals?</i></li> <li>• <i>How does the RFP create space for vendors/providers to propose solutions that will help achieve the outcome goals?</i></li> <li>• <i>How will you measure whether the procured program or service is making progress toward the goal?</i></li> </ul>
Evaluation Process & Selection Criteria	A purposeful <b>evaluation and selection process</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>How does the selection process identify the proposals most likely to achieve the stated outcome goals?</i></li> <li>• <i>What information do you need from proposers?</i></li> </ul>

# Develop your problem statement and background.

The **problem statement** should address the need for the product or service: why is it critical to the jurisdiction? Without this product or service, what happens? Some examples below:

SERVICE	PROBLEM STATEMENT
<b>Economic development study</b>	The Mayor's Office is unsure what criteria to use for determining which businesses will create inclusive growth.
<b>Apprenticeship programs</b>	In spite of a stagnant unemployment rate, there is demand for carpenters, locksmiths, and electricians across Citylandia.
<b>Job search and interview workshops</b>	Research from Springfield University has shown that Statelandia's unemployed cite not knowing about job opportunities and a lack of resources as a chief reason for not finding work.

A **background**, meanwhile, gives proposers a sense of what makes this project unique in its needs and challenges.

**Topics that inform service delivery could include:**

- Number and type of users and accounts
- Brief overview of processes and procedures
- Recent events that highlight a need
- How this project connects with the government's strategic goals



# Using your problem statement as a starting point, concretize your goal.

Your goal is the **outcome** you hope to achieve from that service. It is **NOT** to finalize the contract or get the lowest price.

## A good goal statement will...

- Articulate a **vision of success**
- Emphasize **outcomes** rather than process
- **Focused** enough to be actionable, realistic, and quantifiable

## *Instead of...*

- “Purchase an apprenticeship training at the lowest cost that meets Statelandia’s needs.”
- “Help middle-age job seekers through job training programs.”



## *Try these!*

- “**Reduce the number of vacancies and rate of turnover in technical fields** by expanding apprentice training in construction and electrical wiring for young adults.”
- “**Decrease unemployment among middle-age job seekers** by administering trainings on interviewing and resume writing, with a focus on rural counties.”

# Another good set of goals from Chicago, IL



The goal of the DFSS Employment Preparation and Placement (EPP) program is **to connect Chicago’s most vulnerable residents to career navigation and supportive services to help them identify and overcome their barriers to employment and prepare them for full-time permanent job opportunities** with wages at or above Chicago’s minimum wage.

With this RFP, DFSS seeks to support and help accelerate the city of Chicago’s equitable recovery from the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic by funding career navigation and supportive services targeting low-income individuals who are or at risk of homelessness, residents whose limited English proficiency restricts their access to opportunity, and returning citizens – individuals who have served prison terms, are transitioning from incarceration, and/or have an arrest or conviction record as a barrier to employment.

Clear, but not overly prescriptive goal that establishes outcomes and cues up potential key performance indicators (KPIs), such as wages and employment rate.

It establishes target populations early (e.g., limited English proficiency, those at risk of homelessness).

# And clearly state your target population.

Whose needs do you want your program to address? Which individuals or communities do you want vendors to focus on in service delivery?



## Senior Services – Intensive Case Advocacy and Support for At-Risk Seniors

### BEFORE:

*The Intensive Case Advocacy and Support (ICAS) for At-Risk Seniors program provides in-home assessment, case advocacy and support, on-going monitoring, and direct assistance for at-risk seniors.*



### AFTER

*According to the 2016 American Community Survey, approximately 48% of the 437,818 seniors ages 60 and above in Chicago are living alone, including 39,491 ages 85 and above. The majority of older adults live independently without assistance. However, some face neglect by others, or lack the capacity to maintain their own safety due to physical or mental health issues – many fall into a state of self-neglect. ICAS targets **highly vulnerable older adults (particularly ages 85 and above) who are often in greatest social and economic need, living alone in a state of self-neglect, at risk to themselves or others, or who lack capacity to manage their own care and safety.***

**What's different about the “after” version?  
What changes can you see?**

# And clearly state your target population.

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## Senior Services – Intensive Case Advocacy and Support for At-Risk Seniors

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- Moves from a broad population definition (e.g., at-risk seniors) to more **specifically defining** the population (e.g., highly vulnerable seniors ages 85+)
- Gives a clear picture of this population using **local data/statistics** (e.g., 39,491 seniors ages 85+ living alone in Chicago)
- Describes **the specific challenges** they face (e.g., living alone in a state of self-neglect)

# Now we'll return to Chicago's workforce RFP to show all these concepts in action.



## Workforce Services – Employment Preparation and Placement Program (EPP)



**MAYOR LORI LIGHTFOOT**

**2022-2023**

### **COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT GRANT APPLICATION (CDGA) REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL (RFP)**

**FOR SOCIAL SERVICE, HOUSING, AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS FUNDED WITH:**

**CITY OF CHICAGO LOCAL FUNDS, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT (CDBG),  
EMERGENCY SOLUTIONS GRANT (ESG), COMMUNITY SERVICES BLOCK GRANT (CSBG), AND  
STATE OF ILLINOIS FORECLOSURE PREVENTION AND EMERGENCY AND TRANSITIONAL HOUSING  
FUNDS**

**CITY OF CHICAGO**

#### **PROGRAM DESCRIPTION:**

##### Goals of this RFP

The goal of the DFSS EPP is to connect Chicago's most vulnerable residents to career navigation and supportive services to help them identify and overcome their barriers to employment and prepare them for full-time permanent job opportunities with wages at or above Chicago's minimum wage.

With this RFP, DFSS seeks to support and help accelerate the city of Chicago's equitable recovery from the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic by funding career navigation and supportive services targeting low-income individuals who are or at risk of homelessness, residents whose limited English proficiency restricts their access to opportunity, and returning citizens – individuals who have served prison terms, are transitioning from incarceration, and/or have an arrest or conviction record as a barrier to employment.

DFSS seeks to partner with community-based organizations that have:

- Expertise in creating pathways to meaningful careers for vulnerable Chicagoans
- Experience serving vulnerable residents successfully with favorable performance outcomes
- Currently funded workforce programming options for vulnerable residents in the city of Chicago

# RFP Drafting

## *Scope of Work*

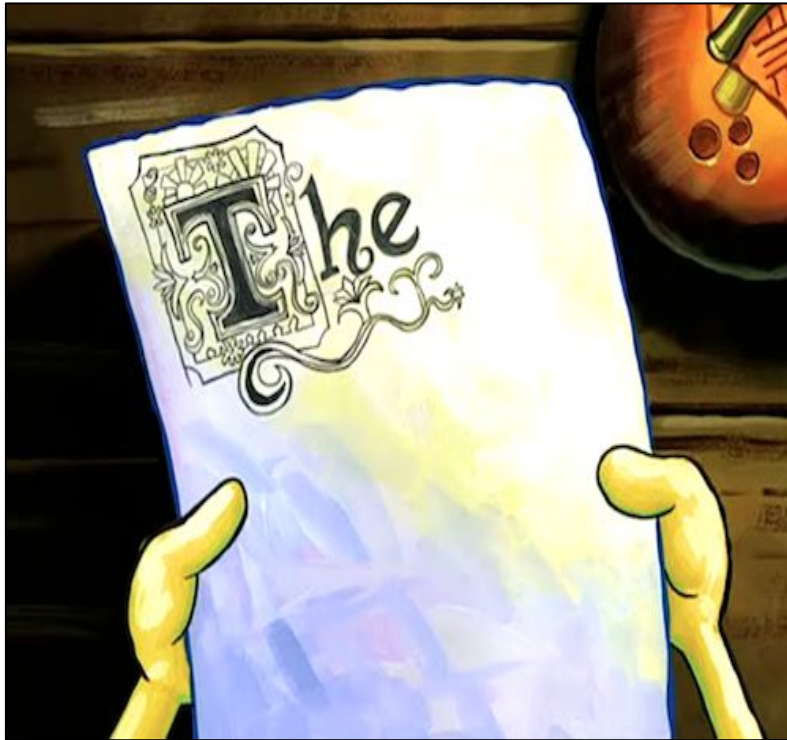
# The best Scopes of Work (SOWs) set the vendor up for success to meet the government's goals.



It should be clear to the vendor how the SOW ensures that the jurisdiction meets the goals of the RFP through the given service.



# What is a Scope of Work (SOW) anyway?



- A well-organized list of activities that need to be accomplished.
- Goal-oriented, not prescriptive.
- Encourages innovation and collaboration.
- Consider it a job description more than a prescriptive to-do (or to-be) list. Let your goal be your guide!



# With goals as your guide, write a “Goldilocks” SOW: neither too vague nor too restrictive.

## NETFLIX

**GOAL:** Direct a family-friendly adventure movie that is ideal for a weeknight: fun, engaging, not too long.

- Vendor must direct a fun, swash-buckling movie that features a catchy jingle.
- Vendor should direct a movie that is less than 120 minutes long, involves a race for buried or hidden treasure, and can feasibly earn a G or PG rating.
- Vendor must direct a film between 105-110 minutes long that features 3 chase scenes and a talking flamingo. She also must have directed at least 10 PG-rated movies before.

*Too vague...* ❌

*Just right!* ✅

*Too specific...* ❌

Remember, **let your goal be your guide!** If you NEED to be restrictive for your goal, then that's OK! Just don't be so prescriptive that vendors can't deliver or overcharge to meet requirements that don't matter.

# Organizing SOWs by Goal

## 2.1 OVERVIEW

Whether meant for City Hall, a sidewalk, or a playground, every capital project initiated by the City should be collaborative, on time, on budget, and meet its intended goals. To that end, we seek a project management solution that:

1. Promotes transparency by increasing access to data for an array of users
2. Allows for robust workflow visualization of both off-the-shelf templates and user-configured processes
3. Facilitates collaboration
4. Promotes active management of projects and broader initiatives
5. Has the ability to interface with the City's current systems
6. Provides a secure, dependable experience in the office and in the field

The beginning of the SOW lays out the goals of the RFP...

Which are reaffirmed in later parts of the SOW.

## 2.3 ROBUST WORKFLOW VISUALIZATION

The City is looking for one tool that would be used by multiple departments. Each department has diverse workflows and project templates, and would require distinct views, functions, and permissions. We are interested in accessing project templates, but the tool must be able to accommodate different departmental

## 2.5 PROMOTES ACTIVE PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Many existing solutions are overly complex for the City's needs. We are looking for a lightweight solution that will be intuitive for employees with a wide range of technical skills. Rather than serving as a one-way reporting tool to update management, this system should help Project Managers and other staff manage their day-to-day work.

# Organizing SOWs by Program

Contractor shall take steps to manage and sustain relationships with current partners and build relationships with new partners. The Contractor shall:

- a) Convene partners regularly and manage partner relationships with Organization A, Organization B partners, Organization C, and other community partners and donors.
- b) Create opportunities for new partners to participate and for the role of current partners to change as the program matures. Contractor shall recruit and identify new partners and maintain momentum among current partners.
- c) Schedule, plan and lead monthly Organization meetings, in collaboration with the City and other partners.

Instead of goals, you can structure your SOW by a particular aspect of the service or program. In this RFP, Section 5 focuses on relationship-building with new partners.

Notice how it describes the task required (“recruit and identify new partners”) but does not prescribe **HOW** to do that task. It gives room for the vendor to innovate.

# RFP Drafting

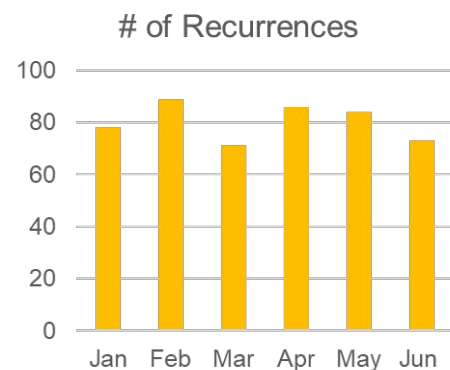
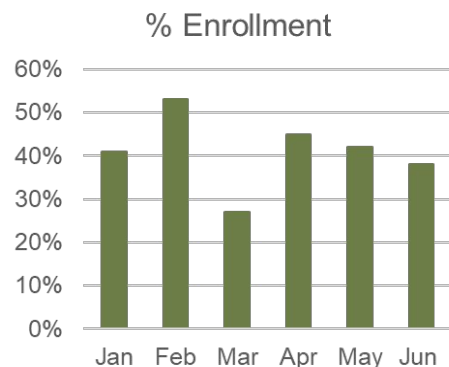
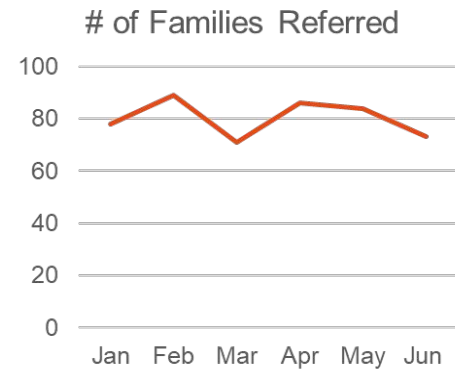
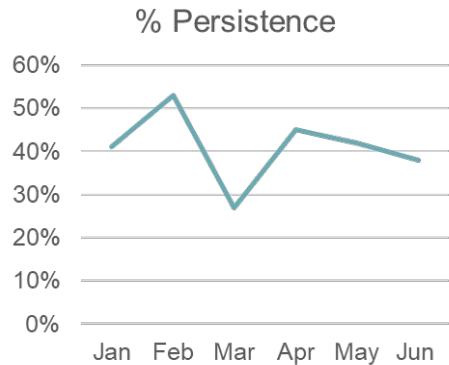
## *Performance Metrics*

# Performance metrics establish how vendors' work will be assessed.

## A great set of metrics:

- ✓ Easily connect to your goals
- ✓ Balance output and outcome measures
- ✓ Clearly define success
- ✓ Are simple and straightforward
- ✓ Can be regularly calculated

*Clear performance metrics and data-driven performance management facilitate identifying and executing evidence-based practices!*



# What are some example performance metrics?

## SERVICE

## OUTPUTS

## OUTCOMES

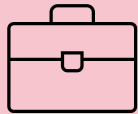
### Apprenticeship program



- Number of participants
- Number of participants by priority population
- Participant retention rate between sessions
- Participant completion rate
- Participant satisfaction with training
- Number of fields covered by apprenticeship trainings

- Percentage and number of participants who remain in unsubsidized employment for 30, 90, 180 days
- Vacancy and turnover rates for priority industries
- Percentage and number of participants who enroll in industry-specific, post-secondary, or vocational training

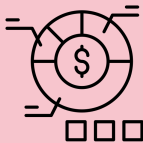
### Job and interview workshops



- Number of participants
- Number of participants by priority region
- Participant retention and completion rates
- Post-workshop skill assessments
- Participant satisfaction with training

- Number of post-workshop job interviews
- Job offer and acceptance rates
- Percentage and number of participants that remain employed

### Economic development study



- Number of stakeholders engaged
- Components of report completed
- Responsiveness to community queries

- Staff assessment of thoroughness/quality of study
- Wages and jobs created by supported businesses identified in the study

# Applying your knowledge to actual RFPs

*We'll now break you out into small groups to discuss real RFPs from two different jurisdictions.*

**SEATTLE, WA:** Employment supports for individuals impacted by the criminal legal system (pages 7-9)

**MINNESOTA:** Tech-training competitive grants (pages 6,7,13)

For **10 minutes**, all groups will review both RFPs (only the selected pages) and discuss the following:

**Groups 1 and 2:** What's the **goal** of these RFPs? What **problems** are they trying to solve?

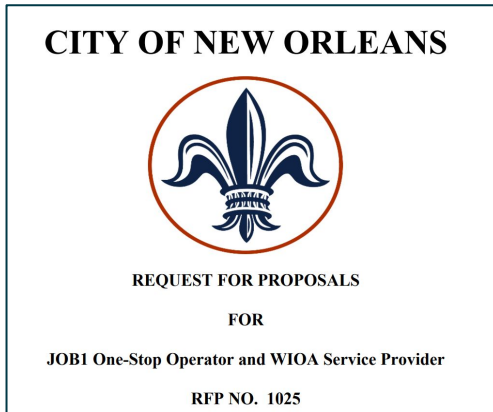
**Groups 3 and 4:** What are their **performance metrics** or outcomes?

**Groups 5 and 6:** Are there any changes you would make to strengthen their **SOWs**?

We'll then report back in **10 minutes** to discuss.



# Examples of strong RFPs



**City of New Orleans-**  
RFP for **One-Stop Operator and WIOA Service Provider** to improve the overall experience at the One-Stop Center.



**City of Chicago- DFSS**  
RFP for **Transitional Jobs Program** to fund career navigation, and temporary subsidized jobs for low-income individuals.



**Connecticut OEC- RFP**  
for **Home Visiting Programs** that prioritize prenatal and infant enrollment using an **evidence-based** home visiting model.

## What do they all have in common?

- Clear SOW
- Defined outcomes
- Good performance metrics



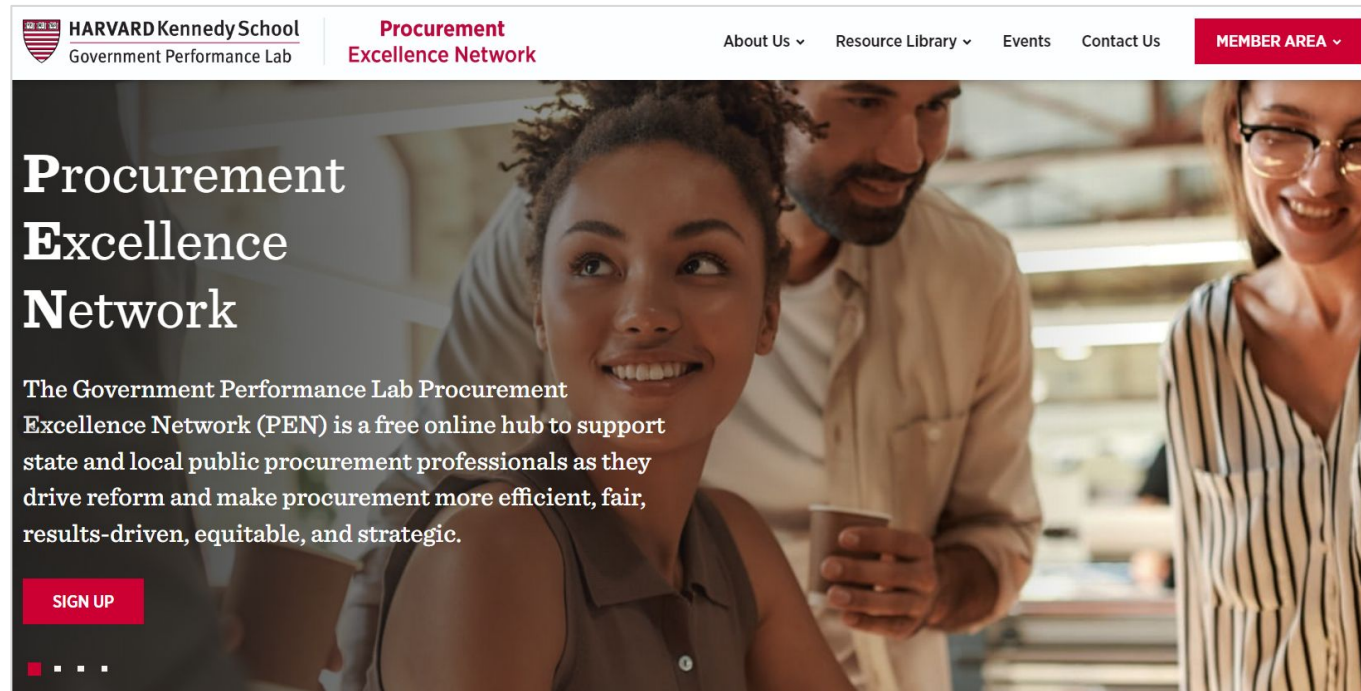
# Questions? Comments?

Type your questions in the chat, and we'll answer them live!  
Feel free to use office hours with GPL staff to workshop  
RFPs in your jurisdiction.

**Thank you!**

# APPENDIX

# What is the Procurement Excellence Network?



## Website Offerings

- Resource Library
- Community Conversations
- Member Portal and Directory

## Non-Website Offerings


- Live Virtual Events
- Office Hours
- Newsletter

[GPLPEN.HKS.HARVARD.EDU](https://gplpen.hks.harvard.edu)

The **Procurement Excellence Network** is a community for procurement professionals who know procurement is a tool for effecting lasting change, a place where innovators and change-makers in state and local government can come together to share best practices, find resources, and refine their craft.

# Resource Library Topics


## PROCESS EFFICIENCY

 EFFICIENT & FAIR

Speeding up, simplifying, and standardizing the steps in the procurement process

[VIEW RESOURCES](#)


## DATA & TRANSPARENCY

 EFFICIENT & FAIR

Using data to increase transparency, identify cost savings, and improve procurement operations

[VIEW RESOURCES](#)


## SOLICITATION PLANNING, WRITING, & EVALUATION

 RESULTS-DRIVEN

Conducting market research, drafting outcomes-focused solicitations and evaluation criteria

[VIEW RESOURCES](#)

## CONTRACT MANAGEMENT & VENDOR PERFORMANCE

 RESULTS-DRIVEN

Improving outcomes for residents by better managing contracts and evaluating vendor performance

[VIEW RESOURCES](#)


## VENDOR DIVERSITY & OUTREACH

 EQUITABLE

Correcting disparities to increase vendor diversity by understanding barriers and setting equity goals

[VIEW RESOURCES](#)

## DELIVERING CONTRACTED SERVICES EQUITABLY

 EQUITABLE

Understanding if and why contracted services are not being provided equitably to different populations

[VIEW RESOURCES](#)

## COLLABORATING WITH INTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

 STRATEGIC

Elevating procurement's strategic value through staff collaboration and leadership buy-in

[VIEW RESOURCES](#)

## TRAINING & CAPACITY-BUILDING

 STRATEGIC

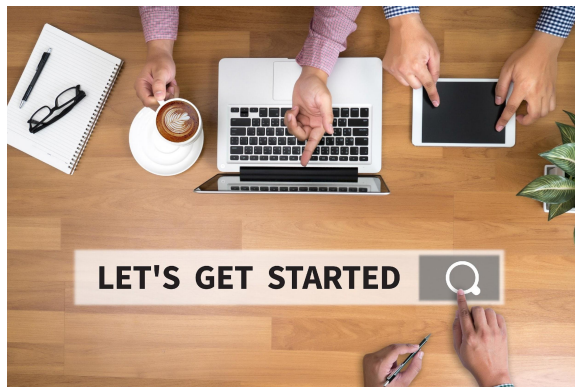
Building procurement knowledge, capacity, and skills by leveraging staff and vendor training

[VIEW RESOURCES](#)

# Example Resources

## Solicitation Getting Started Toolkit

- This toolkit includes three tools you can use to shift towards more proactive engagement with other departments:
  - A procurement intake form
  - A kickoff meeting slide deck
  - An RFP getting started worksheet



## Assessing & Tracking Vendor Performance

- Setting up a vendor performance evaluation system can enable governments to track important performance data over time.
- This how-to guide will help you get started in setting up a vendor performance evaluation system in your government.



## Process Mapping 101

- This slide deck is a resource you can review at your own pace that covers the mechanics of process mapping and how it can be an asset to your procurement transformation efforts.
- The appendix includes sample slides and notes you can use for your own process mapping sessions.





# Getting Started on your RFP

Consider the following questions as you plan for and prepare to write your RFP.

Solicitation Overview	<b>Problem Statement</b>	What problem is the procurement intended to address? What can we share about past or current efforts to solve it?	SOW	<b>Incentive Structure</b>	What contract and payment structure best aligns provider incentives with cost-effective performance? Are there opportunities to link payments to results?
	<b>Outcome Goals</b>	What outcome goals is the department/agency trying to make progress on? What is the gap between where we are today and where we want to be?		Performance	<b>Metrics</b>
	<b>Target Population</b>	Who is the target population, or intended users, for this product or service? Are there equity or access concerns?	<b>Contract Management</b>		What governance structure, including reporting, meeting cadence, and data collection requirements would be appropriate to ensure sufficient oversight?
Scope of Work	<b>Scope of Work</b>	What elements of the scope of work are required to realize our outcome goals, comply with the law, and align with agency priorities?	Evaluation	<b>Scoring Criteria</b>	Which priorities are most important to integrate into scoring criteria? What specific proposal questions best capture those priorities?
	<b>Innovation</b>	Where could the scope allow greater flexibility and opportunities for innovation? Can we shift the focus to “what” rather than “how?”		<b>Risks</b>	What are the biggest risks to the success of the procurement? How can these risks be mitigated?