Effective Proposal Evaluations – FAQs

Webinar Recording: https://center4procurement.org/effective-evaluations/

Evaluation Committee Members & Structure

1. **Does the number of evaluators need to be an odd number?**
   Typically, no. Taking a simple average of the scores can work for regardless of odd/even scenarios. CPE recommends 3 to 7 evaluators as being the "sweet spot" for most projects.

2. **Should evaluators be knowledgeable in the subject matter?**
   Not necessarily. Although subject matter experts bring a valuable perspective, they also have a greater chance of bringing their biases and pre-conceived notions to the evaluations.

   On the other hand, non-subject matter experts can bring a solid, "logic-based" approach to the evaluation process. Non-subject matter experts are usually required to "fill out" the evaluation team (oftentimes organizations may not have enough SMEs to fill the entire committee).

   A balanced approach is often the best, so long as evaluators have at least an introductory level of background knowledge on the project being procured and they are invested in the project outcome.

3. **Any recommendation for when we have only 1 member in the evaluation team as the "expert" and the evaluation team wants to rely in his views?**
   It is very common for one or two members of the evaluation team to be a subject matter expert. However, it is recommended that evaluators each submit their scores individually to avoid "group think" or "lobbying" among the committee members. This can be described as a best practice to gain buy-in from the evaluation team. The non-subject matter expert evaluators should be encouraged that they were invited because they represent a valuable – and different – point of view on the evaluation committee (for example, often they are representing end-users or other non-SME perspectives)

Conducting Effective Interviews

1. **As for the vendor interviews, do you send a question list prior to the vendor for their preparation?**
   A general list of questions can be sent prior to the interviews but it is not required. If you do want interviewees to come ready to answer something extremely specific, then the question(s) should be provided in advance.

   But as a best practice, CPE recommends that the interview questions be non-technical in nature. Interview questions should be designed such that a competent professional (who has reviewed the Statement of Work) would be reasonably expected to answer. This avoids the use of "gotcha" questions that would completely surprise the interviewee.

2. **What point in the process should the whiteboard exercise be completed?**
   This exercise is a great way to conduct your interviews!

3. **What are your thoughts on broad based questions such as "How will your company add value to this project?"**
These types of questions can be OK, but CPE recommends that the questions be made more personal and role-specific. For example, this question can be changed to "In your role, how will you personally add value to this project?" Asking the question in this way require the lead roles of vendor project teams to discuss their expertise and understanding of project-specific needs. In turn, this helps the evaluation team better differentiate between the quality of the vendor teams. Asking questions that are too broad-based typically encourages broad responses that are filled with marketing "fluff" and generic statements (which do not help your evaluators to differentiate between the interview teams)

4. **Why only key personnel in the interview?**
The reference to "key personnel" is more about the number of interviewees who are present in the interview room at any given time. CPE has found that larger interview groups are not ideal because they become more presentation-oriented (think marketing presentations rather than true Q&A interviews). In a large group, 1-2 members of the vendor's team will usually dominate the conversation. Keeping the interview teams smaller puts more accountability on each interviewee to speak up.

Evaluation Scoring

1. **Would you recommend eliminating the highest and lowest score?**
No, CPE does not recommend this. We do recommend that evaluators are trained to follow a thorough Source Selection Plan (SSP) and emphasize the level of responsibility each evaluator should take in providing their scoring (**and** associated justification)

CPE does offer a template SSP. Just contact us for a copy!

2. **When responding vendors have very different license or business models, how do you best work with them to normalize the pricing data?**
This is a question of the client's Statement of Work (SOW). The SOW should provide vendors with a clear benchmark to bid to even if they use different models for how they calculate their price. The cost proposal form in the RFP should reference a common SOW basis for vendors to propose to. CPE utilizes cost proposal forms that enable vendors with different pricing structures to still be compared in an apples-to-apples manner. In short: if the SOW is clear, the prices will be apples-to-apples even if vendors use different approaches or "data" to calculate their proposal price.

Evaluation Forms & Source Selection Plans

1. **Please explain what a Source Selection Plan is. Are there any Source Selection Plan (SSP) samples available?**
The SSP is describes how the evaluation and scoring of proposals will be conducted, including
• Roles & Responsibilities of Procurement / Buyer
• Evaluation Procedures
• Evaluation Instructions
• Ethics and Conflicts of Interest
• Critical Items

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2. **Could you explain the consensus meeting and why not to have one? How do you check deviations between scorer?**
The reason why we do not recommend consensus meeting is that it encourages evaluators to either lean toward what the boss said or another committee member who is very outspoken and enthusiastic about their scores. This could potentially sway the evaluators. As a procurement officer, when scores are not in alignment within the evaluation team, I would look for any evaluator whose scores are deviant and ask that evaluator to clarify and explain their scores. A point to keep in mind is that we are all humans and as

such we have a natural tendency to follow an individual whom we believe to be more knowledgeable about a subject matter. For example, if one person is an accountant and part of the evaluation is accounting related we would naturally relinquish some our opinions as we feel the accountant person is more knowledgeable about general accounting…even though they may not be more knowledgeable in that particular instance. This is where some bias may occur.

3. **I enjoyed your point on avoiding Consensus Meetings at all costs. However, we are required to have Consensus Meetings. What do you recommend in those circumstances?**
In those circumstances, we still recommend that the evaluation team score the proposals individually and then provide those scores to the procurement officer. The procurement officer can the compile the scores leading to a much more efficient consensus meeting. The committee can then use those scores as the basis of a conversation to be finalized in the consensus meeting.

If for some reason the above cannot be done – even informally – then the procurement officer must enforce a fair, open, transparent, ethical, and value-based consensus discussion. The procurement officer should always:
   a) Start the meeting by explaining the foundations of being fair, open, transparent, ethical, and value-based as an evaluation committee.
   b) Remind the committee that they have each been chosen for a reason. They are all representing valuable points of view for the broader organization.
   c) Warn the committee that they should not be lobbying for/against proposals. Tell them directly that we need to avoid group-think and influencing others. Instead, the focus should be on the good of the project and the good of the organization.
   d) And then watch the meeting like a hawk!

4. **Why should we not allow for comments in submittal forms?**
CPE supports justifying comments by evaluators. This creates a more defensible selection outcome and assists with vendor debriefs. Organizations should of course consult their Legal Counsel and be mindful of FOIA requirements.