



## Results-driven contracting: Twelve strategies for gathering constructive input to improve your RFP

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*This technical guide highlights twelve strategies that government agencies can use to gather input from internal and external sources that can be used to improve the quality of a planned procurement for goods or services. With each strategy, we offer an example of a government that has used this approach and a link to additional information where available.*

### ***Why governments benefit from an information-gathering step in developing procurements***

Many governments procurements fail to generate innovative responses or increase competition with new vendors, which can contribute to higher costs, stagnant results, or disappointing client outcomes. Government agencies often reuse procurement documents year after year without considering changes to their priorities, advancements in the marketplace, or opportunities for new solutions. Tight timelines, complex programs, and limited staff resources can make it difficult for agencies to systematically reassess needs, gather strategic input in designing new solutions, or engage with providers to help them understand the departments goals and priorities.

As part of developing a new procurement, new ideas and unrecognized challenges can be uncovered by soliciting ideas and feedback from front-line staff, national experts, vendors in the community, and other stakeholders – such as through a hands-on user research, issuing a request for information (RFI), or examining solutions in other jurisdictions.

### ***Collecting information from internal and external sources***

In our work with dozens of jurisdictions around the country, we have observed twelve strategies that governments have used to systematically gather constructive input towards strengthening procurements prior to the issuance of a formal request for proposals (RFP) or similar solicitation.

Most agencies should select a subset of these strategies to pursue. The number of strategies may be based upon the procurement timeline and the agency's desire to generate bids from new vendors and rethink how goods or services have been previously delivered.

We have found that procurement rules in most jurisdictions allow for each of these activities even if there is a limited track record of using them.

It is also necessary to invest sufficient leadership time after deploying these strategies and before issuing the RFP to sort through information gathered, synthesize the most important insights, and incorporate these findings with adjustments to the program design or contract specifications.

## Strategies

These activities help governments achieve three functional tasks necessary for developing a results-driven procurement:

- 1) Scoping the government’s needs and goals to be addressed by the contracted good or service
- 2) Exploring potential solutions to the identified need(s), including new approaches that may not have been previously considered by the government
- 3) Engaging the vendor community to prepare the marketplace to respond with bids that best meet the agency’s goals

These strategies are organized according to whether they seek information from sources inside or outside of the agency for whom the goods or services are being bought. We highlight the functional tasks for which each strategy is most appropriate.

### Strategies that use sources of information internal to the agency:

	Use case		
	Scope Needs	Explore Solutions	Prepare Vendors
<p><b>1. Analyze prior program delivery data and outcomes, such as complaint lines, waitlists, and client results</b></p> <p><i>Example:</i> Massachusetts’ analysis of client waitlists for adult basic education and English for speakers of other languages classes informed its design of new programs to meet the needs of this population (<a href="https://hwpi.harvard.edu/files/govlabs/files/massachusetts_adult_basic_education_pfs_providers_rfp.pdf">https://hwpi.harvard.edu/files/govlabs/files/massachusetts_adult_basic_education_pfs_providers_rfp.pdf</a>).</p>	✓		
<p><b>2. Collect input from frontline staff about challenges in existing programs</b></p> <p><i>Example:</i> In procuring for new discharge planning services for individuals re-entering from incarceration, Rhode Island’s Department of Corrections included an extensive analysis of the existing operational challenges that made improving results difficult (<a href="https://govlab.hks.harvard.edu/files/govlabs/files/rhode_island_doc_rfp.pdf">https://govlab.hks.harvard.edu/files/govlabs/files/rhode_island_doc_rfp.pdf</a>).</p>	✓	✓	
<p><b>3. Process map existing programs to find potential efficiencies</b></p> <p><i>Example:</i> The City of Denver’s Public Works agency saved \$5 million on fleet management by process mapping to identify opportunities for improvement (<a href="https://denpeakacademy.com/">https://denpeakacademy.com/</a>).</p>	✓	✓	

<p><b>4. Hold “assumption-busting” sessions with agency staff to test planned solutions</b></p> <p><i>Example:</i> See GPL technical guide describing an approach for government agencies to rapidly produce constructive feedback from internal stakeholders about ways to strengthen a planned procurement (<a href="https://govlab.hks.harvard.edu/files/govlabs/files/assumption_buster_guide_for_rdc.pdf">https://govlab.hks.harvard.edu/files/govlabs/files/assumption_buster_guide_for_rdc.pdf</a>).</p>	✓	✓	
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**Strategies that use sources of information external to the agency:**

	Use case		
	Scope Needs	Explore Solutions	Prepare Vendors
<p><b>5. Issue a Request for Information (RFI)</b></p> <p><i>Example:</i> The Louisville Department of Metro Corrections released an RFI seeking information from substance abuse treatment providers interested in providing services to inmates released from city jails. (<a href="https://govlab.hks.harvard.edu/files/govlabs/files/louisville_doc_pfs_rfi.pdf">https://govlab.hks.harvard.edu/files/govlabs/files/louisville_doc_pfs_rfi.pdf</a>)</p>	✓	✓	✓
<p><b>6. Conduct research with end-users, such as focus groups with service recipients</b></p> <p><i>Example:</i> In procuring a new regional bike share operator, the City of Boston and its neighboring municipalities of Brookline, Cambridge, and Somerville revamped performance metrics to better capture the user experience at high-traffic times and locations (<a href="https://govlab.hks.harvard.edu/boston-ma-bike-share-system">https://govlab.hks.harvard.edu/boston-ma-bike-share-system</a>).</p>	✓		
<p><b>7. Convene vendor town halls, webinars, industry days, or information sessions</b></p> <p><i>Example:</i> Rhode Island’s child welfare agency convened a public summit that generated input from providers on a new strategy for revamping its array of services (<a href="http://www.dcyf.ri.gov/docs/summit/index.php">http://www.dcyf.ri.gov/docs/summit/index.php</a>).</p>		✓	✓
<p><b>8. Survey industry participants</b></p> <p><i>Example:</i> The City of Saint Paul surveyed street construction vendors to assess their experiences with the City and inform changes to increase competition on RFPs (<a href="http://bloombg.org/2hZVyyq">http://bloombg.org/2hZVyyq</a>).</p>			✓

<p><b>9. Invite vendors to competitively prototype solutions</b></p> <p><i>Example:</i> City of Boston held a “Hackathon” with permitting application prototypes to test ideas about what the city needed to procure prior to releasing an RFP (<a href="https://hubhacks.devpost.com/submissions">https://hubhacks.devpost.com/submissions</a>).</p>		✓	✓
<p><b>10. Conduct a formal feasibility assessment</b></p> <p><i>Example:</i> The South Carolina Department of Health and Human Services supported a feasibility study to determine instruments for scaling nurse home visiting program for first-time, low-income mothers and their children. (<a href="https://govlab.hks.harvard.edu/files/govlabs/files/south_carolina_nfp_pfs_rfi.pdf">https://govlab.hks.harvard.edu/files/govlabs/files/south_carolina_nfp_pfs_rfi.pdf</a>).</p>	✓	✓	
<p><b>11. Explore academic research literature and conduct expert interviews</b></p> <p><i>Example:</i> Illinois combined national and local research to explore common challenges and possible for programs to improve outcomes for youth dually-involved in the foster care and juvenile justice systems (<a href="https://govlab.hks.harvard.edu/files/govlabs/files/illinois_child_welfare_pfs_feasibility_rfp.pdf">https://govlab.hks.harvard.edu/files/govlabs/files/illinois_child_welfare_pfs_feasibility_rfp.pdf</a>).</p>	✓	✓	
<p><b>12. Seek examples from other jurisdictions</b></p> <p><i>Example:</i> Many cities have looked to Seattle to learn about and benefit from the city’s experiences with homelessness (<a href="https://www.seattle.gov/homeless-investments-rfp">https://www.seattle.gov/homeless-investments-rfp</a>).</p>		✓	✓

For more information on results-driven contracting strategies that can improve procurement results, please visit our website at <https://govlab.hks.harvard.edu/results-driven-contracting>.

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