State of Rhode Island
Division of Purchases
DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATION

**Strategic Procurement Coaching
Playbook**

This playbook provides guidance for helping state agencies improve the results of their procurements. Section I discusses how additional assistance can enable agencies to overcome barriers to effective procurement. Section II offers several possible topics and formats for such assistance, and Section III describes tools and templates available for use alongside coaching to help agencies.

I. Procurement Assistance can Improve Contract Results

Tight timelines, complex rules, and limited staff resources can make it difficult for agencies to plan and execute procurements in ways that maximize the likelihood of positive outcomes for clients or innovations that increase value for taxpayers. Extra assistance on procurement can help agencies focus attention on and elevate the most important factors for improving the results of RFPs and the resulting contracts.

The Division of Purchases provides agencies with resources such as templates, worksheets, checklists, and timelines to support the procurement process. Agencies often need additional assistance to learn how to get the most out of these tools. Coaching can provide an outside perspective to help agencies challenge assumptions, engage internal and external stakeholders, and focus on desired contract results. For example:

- An administrator from one Rhode Island agency had been charged by the director with substantially improving client outcomes associated with a long-standing set of safety net services but had trouble envisioning the planning and development steps required to generate new solutions from the vendor community. With a single 90-minute consultation, the administrator was able to backwards map a tailored procurement timeline which would enable the agency to revamp critical components of the program. Through continued coaching, this agency was also able to pull up and look at the broader portfolio of contracts to recommend where to focus scarce resources and prioritize attention.
- Another Rhode Island agency struggled with whether to issue a joint RFP with another agency that was contracting for similar services. With assistance, the agency gathered internal staff to test the initial theory about what they were ultimately seeking to accomplish. This "assumption-busting" exercise allowed staff to ask critical questions that uncovered important gaps in the planned scope of work and helped the agency identify five identify five strategic questions that they needed to address before finalizing the RFP. This process ultimately led to a determination that agency needs would be better met by two separate RFPs.
- Coaching helped a third agency revise a planned RFI to more clearly convey to vendors the department's vision of future operations and priority areas for new solutions – both of which had recently changed due to new federal regulations. With less technical jargon and a more explicit discussion of current performance, the revamped RFI resulted in more than twice as many responses as anticipated, including several from vendors new to the state.

As these examples illustrate, procurement is more than a process; it's a chance to think about what might be done differently and what new solutions exist to bring about the vision an agency is working toward. Procurement is an important part of an agency's strategy to achieve its mission and goals.

II. Providing Assistance: Procurement Coaching Topics and Formats

This section contains suggestions for how to deliver procurement-related assistance to agencies. The substantive topics agencies often need help with are presented first, followed by possible formats for how to work with agencies on a given topic.

Coaching Topics: Procurement Challenges Requiring Assistance

Below are several common procurement opportunities that coaching can help Rhode Island agencies address. While the particular needs of each procurement should inform which of these sessions to facilitate, many procurements may need help with many or all of these topics. Identifying three areas where a procurement needs the most help may be a useful way to prioritize and target assistance.

Selecting contracts to prioritize for performance improvement

With many contracts spread over different departments and divisions, it can be difficult to know which contracts to select for intensive attention. Given limited resources, not every contract can or should be a focus for additional assistance. One useful starting point is reviewing a list of all existing contracts with agency staff that have a broad view of programs, such as contract managers or fiscal staff, and deciding on criteria for contract attention. Common criteria include: (1) contracts where the department has substantial discretion for funding decisions, (2) contracts that are large in dollar amount or reach of program relative to other agency initiatives, (3) contracts that reflect strategic policy priorities for agency and executive leadership, (4) contracts on which insufficient process is being made in achieving positive results, and (5) contracts that are cause for concern, for reasons such as an outdated scope of work or funding that is no longer distributed as originally intended.

Contracts that meet multiple criteria may be good candidates for attention. Making this process of reviewing and prioritizing contracts a regular occurrence (e.g., annually, semi-annually, or quarterly) can help agencies anticipate where work will need to be done and avoid surprises.

Once a priority procurement is identified for additional attention, it's helpful to identify the main challenges that the agency wants to address with the contract. These challenges are often revealed in conversation with the relevant programmatic staff and by reviewing data related to program performance. Identifying key challenges and objectives for the contract focuses agency staff on the goals of the procurement, and as stated above, can inform what types of additional assistance would be most valuable.

Creating a procurement timeline to drive action

Agencies often find it difficult to get in front of the procurement process and allocate sufficient time for the various activities that need to take place before goods or services can be delivered. Helping an agency create a timeline for a specific procurement can be helpful for agencies both to plan for the procurement process and to motivate action. A template procurement timeline is included in Section III.

Developing and/or reviewing an assessment of agency needs and procurement strategy

Often agencies begin the procurement process by immediately drafting an RFP without pausing to ensure there is clarity around what needs to be procured and why; this can lead to contracted goods or services that fail to meet the needs of the agency and advance the agency's goals.

Assisting an agency in completing a Strategy and Needs Assessment, such as the Needs Assessment Worksheet in Section III, helps solidify the foundation for a procurement and illuminates areas of the strategy that require more thought or consideration.

Vetting initial program and procurement strategy

Because agency staff are often hurried to get an RFP written and out on the street, sufficient time and attention may not be given to test ideas with other internal stakeholders and receive feedback on the overall procurement strategy. An easy and efficient way to create a pause for thinking and feedback is to gather a small group of internal experts, present the performance objectives and anticipated scope of work, and ask the group to identify assumptions, poke holes in an agency's initial thinking about what needs to be procured an why, and ask critical questions in order to identify where the group needs to do more work before writing the RFP. This type of session can be incredibly valuable for agency staff and is relatively easy to put together, even without previous engagement with the procurement team. See Section III for a facilitation guide for an Assumption-Buster Exercise.

Generating external input to improve program and procurement strategy

When agencies try to generate new solutions or get better contract results, it can be incredibly valuable to solicit input from front-line staff, national experts, vendors in the community, and other stakeholders – such as through a Request for Information (RFI). Walking agencies through the options for gathering more information before drafting the RFP, as well as sharing examples of strategies other jurisdictions have used, can help agencies choose a strategy to inform their RFP. The procurement resource library (under Coaching Structures below) and the worksheet on Strategies for Gathering Information to Inform RFP Development (Section III) are good resources for this work.

After identifying a strategy for collecting more information prior to an RFP, it can be helpful to advise on the execution of this strategy, especially if it will be something new or unusual for agency staff. For example, agencies might require additional assistance to clarify their vision presented in a vendor town hall, eliminate jargon from an RFI, or generate powerful research questions ahead of conducting research and analysis.

It may then be helpful to assist agency staff in sorting through the information gathered through pre-RFP strategies such as RFIs, town halls, or research and incorporating key findings into the actual RFP document itself. Synthesizing and organizing these findings, as well as thinking through how best to present this information to potential vendors in the solicitation, will ensure the RFP is best positioned to solicit products and services that help meet the agency's goals.

Reviewing an RFP draft for clarity and alignment with strategic goals

While a central procurement office may review RFP drafts to check off documentation requirements, agencies may find it helpful to review and discuss the quality of the content of the RFP. Agencies often benefit from a read-through to ensure the RFP is clear and free of confusing language, states the agency's and procurement's goals, explains what is currently working and what needs to change, includes the right mix of requirements and flexibility for innovative approaches, and aligns proposal scoring criteria and cost structure with the goals of the RFP. The "Critical Information to Include in an RFP" worksheet found in Section III can be

used both to prompt and guide feedback on an RFP and to organize this type of discussion with agency staff.

Choosing the right payment structure

Contract type and the resulting payment structure can produce incentives that may work for or against the goals an agency is hoping a procurement will help accomplish, yet agencies often choose default or past contract and payment types without pausing to consider and choose among other options. Assisting agencies in thinking through the most appropriate contract type to use, including whether performance payments may be helpful to bring about the results an agency is hoping for, can help agencies make a more informed contract choice.

Designing RFP scoring and evaluation approach

Choosing the proposal that best meets an agency's needs as laid out in the RFP is critical to the success of the resulting contract. Assisting agencies with designing evaluation questions that effectively measure this, helping organize questions into clear categories, setting point values, and including the right people on the evaluation committee can ensure agencies have an evaluation design that supports being able to choose the best proposal.

Preparing for contract negotiations

The contract negotiation phase offers agencies an opportunity to set expectations for vendors around how performance will be measured over the course of the contract as well as a chance to negotiate pricing and other contract terms. Facilitating internal discussions before contract negotiations take place may be helpful for agencies to align around the points they wish to negotiate.

Setting the stage to manage vendor performance

Agencies often need help proactively preparing for some of the most important work on improving the results of a contract, which happens after the contract is signed. Helping agencies set expectations in the RFP and contract itself sets the stage for contract management work. The active contract management worksheet found in Section III can assist programmatic and performance management staff in thinking about the elements of this work, e.g., refining program performance objectives and metrics.

Evaluating contracts to determine whether they should be renewed or re-procured

Agencies often do not sufficiently plan in advance of the end of a contract and rarely review data related to contract performance and assess whether the contract should be extended, renewed, or re-procured. Helping agencies plan enough time to do this work and make an informed decision about what happens after a contract is up can help maintain continuity of services and improve program performance over time, as well as get ahead of any procurement planning that need to take place.

Training new staff on results-driven procurement practices

If new staff are not regularly trained on procurement best practices, knowledge of how to use the procurement process to ensure good contract results can be lost through normal agency staff turnover. Helping agencies create a training plan and content that lays out the most important steps to ensure procurement quality along with how to use available tools and

resources (such as those in Section III) can help ensure procurement expertise remains as staff composition changes.

Coaching Structures: Formats for Assisting Agencies

Below are several possible formats for providing assistance to Rhode Island agencies. While some of the above substantive topics may lend themselves to working with procurement teams individually (e.g., reviewing language for a specific RFP), most topics could be delivered in a variety of settings depending on the needs of the procurements and individuals requesting help. Over time, testing different formats for delivering the same content may be a useful way to find out what works best.

Training workshops

Many programs and agencies view procurement as an administrative function rather than a strategic opportunity to improve program results. Group trainings can be a useful way to expose staff to results-driven contracting concepts and other procurement best practices. These may include trainings offered by the Harvard Kennedy School Government Performance Lab, procurement organizations such as NASPO, or jurisdiction-specific trainings such as the RI Division of Purchases' Procurement 101.

Group working sessions

In order to help agency staff translate the best practices discussed in training workshops to actual changes in solicitation documents and processes, it can be helpful to convene up to 10 individuals who are working on upcoming RFPs. During these sessions, agencies can discuss questions and challenges, give and receive peer feedback, and develop language to use in an RFP, RFI, or other procurement document.

If there are clear shared challenges across multiple agencies, departments or contracts, it may be useful to bring the same staff together for multiple group sessions throughout the procurement process. For example, convening a group to first discuss the completed Procurement Needs Assessment worksheet and a few weeks later discuss the completed Critical Information to Include in an RFP worksheet (see Section III for both worksheets) builds capacity and structure for agency staff to support each other throughout the procurement process.

Individual sessions

While group sessions can be useful for encouraging the use of procurement best practices broadly, individual coaching sessions may be more helpful for addressing challenges unique to a specific procurement opportunity. For example, staff in one agency may need help making the scope of work in their draft RFP less prescriptive but still specific enough to generate meaningful responses. If they know *what* to do but struggle with implementing it on the procurement at hand, an individual conversation with this team will likely be more effective than a group coaching session with other agencies. Many of the following sessions can be implemented in an individual or smaller group setting.

Office hours

When the needs of agency staff don't line up with other types of coaching sessions, or when busy staff schedules require a more flexible, drop-in approach to coaching, holding "office

hours" style appointments can be useful. Individuals or teams working on a procurement can book an hour of time to talk through challenges and develop a strategy for addressing them, e.g., deciding what to include in a scope of work, how to sequence a multi-step RFP, or what the most important elements are to include in proposal scoring criteria.

Affinity group

Agencies often work on procurement-related activities in programmatic silos and do not have the opportunity to share experiences, challenges, and successes related to contracting across other departments and agencies. One way to create space for this is to bring together an informal affinity group of staff who meet periodically to share innovative contracting examples or practices, review specific RFPs, participate in trainings, and discuss similar topics.

Collection of high-quality RFPs and other example documents

As good examples of procurement documents emerge, it can be helpful to collect and organize these documents somewhere that is easily accessible for agency staff, such as a website or shared drive. These materials can be useful for agencies to look to for example language or for inspiration to inform a new approach. A half-page guide for each example document can highlight the elements that are particularly effective as illustrations of good practice.

III. Tools and Templates to Guide Focus on Results

This section presents materials designed to help agencies use the procurement process to improve contract results. While many of these materials could be distributed and used on their own, they can be especially effective at improving contract results when paired with hands-on assistance as described in section II above. This suite of tools, templates, examples, and other resources may be updated for effectiveness as it continues to be tested and used, including adding additional documents and modifying documents to be more helpful in focusing agencies on contract outcomes.

Each of the following documents can be accessed on the Agency Resource Center (ARC) page at the Rhode Island Division of Purchases website: https://www.purchasing.ri.gov/StateAgencyInfoCenter/AgencyLogin.aspx

Procurement One-Pager for New Employee Onboarding

This document is included in new employee onboarding folders and is intended to give new employees a broad understanding of why procurement is important and where to go for procurement resources.

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**Partnering with Third Parties:
Quick-Start Guide to Procurement**

What is procurement?

→ **Procurement is the process of acquiring goods or services from an external party.** Many functions of government involve contracting with private vendors. Several mechanisms exist to procure goods and services in Rhode Island, including request for quotes (RFQ), request for proposals (RFP), sole source, single source, master price agreement (MPA), and continuous recruitment MPA. For information on which type of procurement best fits your needs, access the Agency Resource Center (ARC) on the Division of Purchases website (link below).

Why is procurement important?

→ **Procurement is an opportunity for your team to assess progress and consider opportunities for improvement.** Your department should examine what it is contracting for, how those vendors are performing, and how this impacts your team's goals or performance. It's a chance to think about what might be done differently and what new solutions exist for the problem your team is trying to solve. Procurement is an important part of your team's strategy to achieve your mission and goals.

There seem to be a lot of procurement rules – Why?

→ **Procurement rules are in place to ensure vendors have equal opportunity to do business with the state.** Rhode Island procurement laws and regulations support transparency and level the playing field among potential vendors. To ensure no vendor is unfairly advantaged or disadvantaged, all potential vendors must have access to the same information at the same time about any solicitation. Sharing information with any one or select group of potential vendors, even inadvertently, risks disqualifying that/those organization(s) from bidding on the solicitation.

How do I get started? What resources are available to me?

→ **Get started early!** Critical procurements, including those most integral to your department's mission, take time. They require nuanced thinking about your team's needs, what kind of procurement best suits those needs, and what solutions exist in the marketplace. Doing this work up front allows the procurement process to move more smoothly. Purchases recommends beginning the process at least nine months prior to the desired contract signing date for an RFP, as an RFP typically involves conducting a needs assessment (2 mos.), drafting a solicitation (1 mo.), posting the solicitation (2 mos.), scoring proposals (2 mos.), and issuing an award (2 mos.).[1] Purchases recommends the RFQ process be initiated at least 3 months prior to the desired contract signing date.

→ **Begin with an assessment of your team's needs and relevant policy considerations.** After consulting your leadership and agreeing to pursue a procurement, the process begins by articulating your business need – the objective your team is trying to accomplish. By expressing in writing what success looks like before you ask vendors to help get you there, you are better able to make objective decisions that best serve the state's needs. At a minimum, consider these questions:

Available at: https://www.purchasing.ri.gov/StateAgencyInfoCenter/AgencyLogin.aspx

Procurement Needs Assessment Worksheet

This worksheet is intended to help agencies develop an understanding around the need for and goals of a procurement before developing an RFP.

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Procurement Needs Assessment Worksheet

Completing this worksheet allows your team to map out what you need to procure and why. This information can then be used to present the business case to internal stakeholders, identify outstanding questions, and gather consensus. Ultimately, your team's answers to these questions should closely inform the solicitation for this procurement. See the reverse side for example responses.

Scope the need for this procurement	Explore potential solutions	Prepare the vendor community
1. (a) Consider your agency's mission and the larger program of which the product or service you're procuring will be a part. Name at least three long-term goals this program is trying to achieve. (b) How will the product or service you're procuring contribute to achieving these goals?	4. (a) What strategies are you using to search for potential solutions that could bring about the results you described in question 2? (b) Based on your search, what different approaches exist? Are there any new or innovative methods worth considering?	7. How are you closing the information gap between your department and vendors regarding the goals you described in question 1, the desired results you listed in question 2, and the problems you identified in question 3?
2. Imagine your department in the future, reflecting upon a completely successful implementation of the product or service you're procuring. What are the most important results you'll be celebrating?	5. (a) How are you determining which of the solutions you identified in question 4 are most appropriate for your context and most likely to bring about the desired results? (I.e., research, evidence, stakeholder interviews.) (b) Based on this work, what appear to be the most promising strategies?	8. What tactics are you using to expand the number of vendors who are likely to respond to your solicitation, and also to get new ideas from existing vendors?
3. Consider the product or service that's currently in place, or the way in which your department imperfectly addresses these goals today. Name at least three things that are going well with this approach that you'd like to continue, and name at least three things that *are not* going well and need to change.	6. How are you testing the approaches that you identified in question 5 (b), and checking your assumptions, to validate which strategies will work?	

Available at: https://www.purchasing.ri.gov/StateAgencyInfoCenter/AgencyLogin.aspx

Assumption-Buster Facilitation Guide

This guide is intended to help agencies facilitate a session to solicit internal stakeholder feedback and constructive criticism in order to challenge and strengthen the procurement strategy.

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"Assumption Buster" Exercise – Facilitation Guide

Presenting your ideas to internal stakeholders about what you need to procure and why allows you to inform your organization and solicit feedback. The following "assumption buster" exercise explicitly asks your peers to stress-test your theories and identify areas that need more investigation or clarification. Use this exercise once you have an idea of what you want to procure, but before you've started writing the RFP.

1. Setup

Suggested time	90 minutes, minimum
Suggested number of participants	• 1-2 facilitators (if available, otherwise the presenters can double as facilitators) • 2-3 presenters. These should be the staff who will most closely inform or write the scope of work. • 2-8 respondents. These may be informed users of the good or service you're procuring, such as program staff, or leadership that needs to be brought into the decision-making process.
Materials needed	• Sticky notes (several for each participant) • Markers (one for each participant) • A whiteboard or large blank wall • Printed copies of the presenters' written summary of what needs to be procured and why. A good template for this is the Needs Assessment Worksheet, which can be found on the ARC.[1]
Objectives	1. The group will uncover problematic assumptions and identify ambiguity or incomplete ideas that exist around the scope of need for this procurement. 2. The group will identify a few major questions that need to be resolved before drafting an RFP for the good or service. 3. The group will brainstorm strategies to collect information to help resolve these unresolved questions.

Available at: https://www.purchasing.ri.gov/StateAgencyInfoCenter/AgencyLogin.aspx

Strategies for Gathering Information to Inform RFP Development

This resource lists several tools that agencies can use to collect information to inform the development of an RFP, as well as examples of other agencies or jurisdictions that have used these strategies. The strategies listed here can be helpful for scoping an agency's needs regarding a procurement, exploring potential solutions that address those needs, and/or preparing vendors ahead of a procurement.

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Strategies for Gathering Information to Inform RFP Development

Each of the following tools can be used to gather information to inform procurement strategy and develop insights to be included in the RFP.

	Tool	Scope Needs	Explore Solutions	Prepare Vendors	Example
Gathering info outside your agency	Request for Information (RFI)	✔	✔	✔	RI DHS released an RFI to solicit vendor recommendations on redesigning the RI Works program. http://www.purchasing.ri.gov/RIVIP/StateAgencyBids/7551352.pdf
	User research (e.g., focus groups with service recipients)	✔			The City of Boston conducted user research to identify challenges associated with its permitting processes and communicate these to vendors as key objectives for the RFP. http://bit.ly/2DU7Fc9
	Provider or vendor town halls, webinars, industry days		✔	✔	RI DCYF convened a public summit that generated input from providers on a new strategy for revamping its array of services. http://www.dcyf.ri.gov/docs/summit/index.php
	Industry surveys			✔	The St. Paul Department of Transportation surveyed vendors to assess their experiences with the department and inform changes to increase competition on RFPs. http://bloombg.org/2hZVyyq
	Prototype competitions with vendors		✔	✔	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 https://hubhacks.devpost.com/submissions
	Reviewing current solutions (e.g., on-site observation of existing programs, integrating insights from contract management activities)	✔			RI DCYF used insights from past implementation to inform changes it requested to its Family Care Community Partnership programs. http://www.purchasing.ri.gov/RIVIP/StateAgencyBids/7566517.pdf
	Academic research literature and expert interviews	✔	✔		RI DOH conducted research to inform its RFP for short-term family home visiting services. http://health.ri.gov/rfp/ShortTermFamilyHomeVisitingServices.pdf
	Examples from other jurisdictions		✔	✔	Many cities have looked to Seattle to learn about and benefit from the city's experiences with homelessness. https://www.seattle.gov/homeless-investments-rfp
Gathering info inside your agency	Data analysis of existing info (e.g., complaint lines, waitlists, etc.)	✔			RI DOC, in preparation for an RFP for re-entry services, conducted analysis to identify the geographic distribution of the project's target population. http://www.purchasing.ri.gov/RIVIP/StateAgencyBids/7551107.pdf
	Implementation of prior programs, including on-site observation of existing programs or approach and prior contract management	✔			RI DOC included an analysis of its current case management system in an RFP for regional discharge planning services. http://www.purchasing.ri.gov/RIVIP/StateAgencyBids/7565519.pdf
	Process mapping to find efficiencies	✔	✔		The City of Denver's Public Works agency saved $5 million on fleet management by process mapping to identify opportunities for improvement. https://denpeakacademy.com/
	"Assumption Buster" session with peers	✔	✔		The US Agency for International Development conducts internal feedback and hole-poking sessions with staff to vet and improve proposals for new programs before funding is approved. https://www.purchasing.ri.gov/StateAgencyInfoCenter/AgencyLogin.aspx

Available at: https://www.purchasing.ri.gov/StateAgencyInfoCenter/AgencyLogin.aspx

Procurement Type Guide

This guide walks agencies through the different types of procurements (solicitations), including when to use each and how to get started.

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Selecting the Appropriate Procurement Type

This document is intended to provide Rhode Island state agencies with a guide to determine what type of procurement to pursue. For procurement-related questions, please contact your Interdepartmental Project Manager at the Division of Purchases or call the Division of Purchases main number: (401) 574-8100. The Agency Resource Center[1] (ARC) on the Division of Purchases website contains additional resources.

Procurement Type	Description & When to Use	How to Get Started
Master Price Agreement (MPA)	A **Master Price Agreement (MPA)** provides agencies with a list of qualified vendors for goods or services for which there is a shared need. They are solicited as **Requests for Proposals** (RFPs) or **Requests for Quotes** (RFQs). See below for more information on RFQs and RFPs. There are approximately 200 MPAs in the state portfolio; examples include road salt, office supplies, small appliance repairs, energy efficiency services, etc. When there is an existing MPA for the good or service you need, you should buy from the **existing MPA**. If there is no existing MPA but it's likely that other departments share a need for this good or service, request the **creation of a new MPA**. If the need is not shared and instead is specific to your department, pursue an **RFQ** or **RFP** instead (see below). An MPA may also be a **Continuous Recruitment** (see below).	• Search for existing MPAs on the Division of Purchases website.[2] • To buy from an existing MPA, consult the MPA user guide, which can be found on the website. The user guide provides information such as contract summary and terms, purchase order processing instructions, vendor work order limits, delivery instructions, etc. • To request the creation of a new MPA, contact the appropriate Interdepartmental Project Manager (IPM) at the Division of Purchases. • For more information, see the MPA FAQ document on the Division of Purchases website.[3]
Request for Proposals (RFP)	A Request for Proposals (RFP) is a solicitation for goods or services. An RFP should be used when it is appropriate to evaluate proposals on technical factors such as work plan, method, expertise, etc., in addition to cost. An RFP may be used to solicit an **MPA** if the need for this good or services is shared by other agencies or departments. (See above for more information.)	• Access the RFP Checklist and RFP Timeline, both available on the ARC, to plan out the RFP process. • Begin with an assessment of the needs related to this procurement. For more guidance, complete the Needs Assessment Worksheet on the ARC.
Request for Quotes (RFQ)	A **Request for Quotes** (RFQ) is a solicitation for goods or services. An RFQ should be used when it is appropriate to evaluate proposals on cost alone; this is often the case for commodities or like goods. An RFQ may be used to solicit an **MPA** if the need for this good or services is shared by other agencies or departments. (See above for more information.)	• Identify the specifications for the good or service you wish to buy and enter them into the requisition.
Continuous Recruitment	A **continuous recruitment** is an option for goods and services which are solicited via **RFP** and **RFQ**, including for **MPAs**. Use a continuous recruitment when you need the opportunity to bring on additional vendors during the term of the contract or would like a prequalified list of vendors from which to solicit quotes.	• Contact the IPM associated with your purchase to request the creation of a continuous recruitment. If you are unsure who the appropriate IPM is, call the Division of Purchases at (401) 574-8100.

Available at: https://www.purchasing.ri.gov/StateAgencyInfoCenter/AgencyLogin.aspx

RFP Checklist

This step-by-step guide gives agencies an understanding of the entire RFP process, the specific sequence of steps agencies should follow, and several recommendations to use the procurement process to improve contract results.

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Checklist: Agency RFP Process

This document is intended to guide Rhode Island state agencies through the Request for Proposals (RFP) procurement process, from identifying the need for a procurement (stage I below) to the issue of a purchase order (stage V). If you have questions about procurement or the RFP process, please contact the Division of Purchases at (401) 574-8100.

I. Needs Assessment Stage:

☐ 1. Review procurement resources on the Agency Resource Center (ARC)[2]

The ARC is a centralized location for materials agencies and departments may find helpful during the procurement process, such as RFP templates, checklists, training materials, and supporting documents.

☐ 2. Identify someone in your agency to lead the development of the RFP

☐ 3. Assess your agency's needs and resolve policy questions related to this procurement

Any procurement should begin with building understanding and consensus around the problem that your team needs to solve. By articulating in writing what success looks like before you ask vendors to help get you there, you avoid disconnects about expectations both internally and with vendors. You are better able to make objective decisions that best serve your team's needs.

○ For more guidance, access the Procurement Needs Assessment Worksheet on the ARC.

○ At a minimum, consider the following guiding questions:

▪ What is the challenge/innovation/change that this RFP will address?

▪ What would you like a solution to achieve? What will be the benefit from implementing this solution?

▪ How will you measure success – the degree to which the good or service procured solves the problem your team faces?

▪ What solutions have worked to address this problem, or similar problems, elsewhere?

○ Understand your budget, anticipated questions, and constraints on spending.

Available at: https://www.purchasing.ri.gov/StateAgencyInfoCenter/AgencyLogin.aspx

RFP Timeline

This worksheet helps agencies plan and execute the RFP process by creating a customized timeline for a specific RFP.

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Timeline: RFP Process

This timeline is intended to help RI state agencies plan for and execute the Request for Proposals (RFP) procurement process, from identifying the need for a procurement to the issuance of a purchase order. For more procurement resources, access the Agency Resource Center (ARC) on the Division of Purchases website.[1] For further questions, contact the Division of Purchases at (401) 574-8100.

Start early! Critical procurements require nuanced thinking up front about what your team really needs, what type of procurement best suits those needs, and what solutions exist in the marketplace. Doing this work up front means that the procurement process itself will move more smoothly. The Division of Purchases recommends that your team begin the RFP process *at least nine months prior to your desired contract signing date*. You may need to plan additional time for projects that are large or complex, require transition periods between vendors, or will involve additional parties such as consultants or advisors.

Start at the end! It will be most helpful to fill out this timeline backward, beginning with the date you desire work related to this contract to begin.

Date to be completed	Tasks to complete
_____	**Identify those individuals that will lead the development of the RFP.** Build additional time into this timeline to secure outside resources such as consultants, other advisors, or external funding.
_____	**Complete needs assessment and identify outstanding policy and procurement strategy questions.** Identify important questions around the procurement strategy and related policy. Complete the Needs Assessment Worksheet, available on the ARC.[1] *Suggested timeframe: 2-4 weeks to complete needs assessment, with longer time frames for more complex procurements.*
_____	**Resolve policy questions and finalize procurement strategy** *Suggested timeframe: At least 4 weeks to resolve policy questions and finalize strategy, with longer time frames for more complex procurements.*
_____	**Draft an RFP and template contract** Complete the RFP Development Worksheet[1]. Use the completed worksheet to draft the RFP in the Division of Purchases RFP template.[1] Work with your legal counsel to draft a template of the contract to attach with the RFP. *Suggested timeframe: 4 weeks to draft RFP and template contract.*

Available at: https://www.purchasing.ri.gov/StateAgencyInfoCenter/AgencyLogin.aspx

Critical Information to Include in an RFP

This worksheet helps agencies develop language for the elements of an RFP that are most critical for improving contract results.

State of Rhode Island
Division of Purchases
DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATION

Critical Information to Include in an RFP

Completing this worksheet allows your team to translate important takeaways from the "needs assessment" stage of procurement into a solicitation document. Ensuring your solicitation document clearly communicates the answers to each question below sets your contracts up to achieve better outcomes for your department.

Advance Strategic Priorities	Encourage Innovation	Prepare for Active Contract Management
Align the procurement with department strategy and program goals	*Articulate a vision of success while leaving appropriate flexibility for creative solutions*	*Set the stage for collaborating with vendors to use data and improve performance over time*
1. What is the problem this procurement is intended to help address? Specifically: a. What outcome goal(s) is the department trying to make progress on? b. What is the gap between where we are today and where we want to be?	5. What elements of the scope of work are required?	8. What language will you include in the draft contract attached to the RFP to communicate your department's expectations for vendors around the performance objectives and priorities defined in question 1?
2. How will you measure whether you have made progress on the goal(s) you defined in question 1? Specifically: a. Which metrics can be used in the RFP to orient vendors toward your vision of success?	6. Where could you adjust the scope of work to allow vendors flexibility to develop innovative solutions? a. Which specifications and requirements can be loosened or eliminated? b. How can you shift focus to "what" the department is trying to achieve, rather than limiting "how"? c. Where can you ask vendors to use their expertise to propose an appropriate standard, rather than imposing one?	9. What expectations around reporting, meeting, and data will you include in both the RFP and the attached draft contract to set vendors up for Active Contract Management and continual performance improvement?
3. Who is the target population, or intended users, for this product or service? Describe this population and their needs.		10. What contract and payment structure best aligns vendor incentives with cost-effective performance? Where might there be opportunities to link provider payments to results? What contract term or length is most appropriate?
4. What other insights came out of your needs assessment work (see the "Needs Assessment Worksheet" on the ARC[1]) that would help potential vendors prepare useful and creative proposals? Use the RFP to clearly communicate these.	7. Which priorities are most important to integrate into scoring criteria? Consider: a. Measuring past performance, if appropriate b. Asking vendors to justify the proposal's potential to achieve the goal(s) identified in question 1	11. What are the biggest risks to the success of this procurement and contract? How will you mitigate these?

Available at: https://www.purchasing.ri.gov/StateAgencyInfoCenter/AgencyLogin.aspx

Preparing for Active Contract Management

This worksheet prepares agencies to actively manage contracts to improve the performance of priority contracts over time by using data and collaborating with vendors.

State of Rhode Island
Division of Purchases
DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATION

Preparing for Active Contract Management

Performance Improvement Opportunities	Implementation
1. What is the motivation for regularly reviewing performance data?	6. What is the appropriate cadence for meeting with providers to review real-time performance data and promote continuous learning and improvement?
2. What are the most important leading indicators, outcome metrics, or other performance measures that we want to be frequently tracking and reviewing with providers? Identify up to five.	7. Who needs to regularly be "in the room" to enable rapid barrier busting when performance lags? How can sufficient participation by senior leadership be assured to support these efforts?
3. Against what benchmarks shall provider performance be compared? Potential benchmarks may include historical outcomes, peers, specified targets, third-party standards, national best practices, or others.	8. What data sources are available – or need to be developed – to generate performance information for frequent review? How reliable is this data?
4. In human services, how are we going to match and refer clients to services? How will we check if matching and referral procedures are working?	9. Who from the agency will perform necessary data analysis and develop meeting materials? Who will be responsible for directing further analytical needs and identifying the practice implications raised by the data?
5. On what topics do we anticipate needing in-depth analysis on provider performance and client outcomes to proactively support system improvement?	10. How will the agency support regular follow-up and action based on dashboard and roadmap information? Potential solutions may include ad hoc working groups, individual case pulls, and/or dedicated follow-up time on meeting agendas.

Available at: https://www.purchasing.ri.gov/StateAgencyInfoCenter/AgencyLogin.aspx

Sample Active Contract Management Contract Language

This appendix provides an example of language related to active contract management that can be appended to a solicitation document. This language sets expectations for both vendors and government around collaborating and using data to improve contract performance over time.

APPENDIX B. PRINCIPLES OF ACTIVE CONTRACT MANAGEMENT

The State of Rhode Island seeks to actively and regularly collaborate with the vendor and other stakeholders to enhance accountability and contract management, improve results, and adjust the delivery of products or services based upon learning what works.

As part of this effort, the State expects all awarded vendors to adhere to the following principles of active contract management in order to improve the performance of contracted products and services over time.

1. **Defined Performance Objectives**

   The vendor and the State recognize the importance of defining key performance objectives that the contracted products or service(s) are intended to accomplish. Performance objectives inform data fields to be collected, outcome and indicator metrics to be reported, and trends to be monitored.

2. **Reliable Data Collection and Reporting**

   The vendor and State recognize that reliable and relevant data is necessary to ensure contract compliance, evaluate contract results, and drive improvements and policy decisions. Sharing data between the vendor and the State on a regular basis can ensure that key stakeholders operate with a common understanding of performance and trends.

3. **Consistent and Collaborative Meetings to Review and Improve Performance**
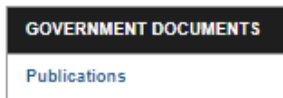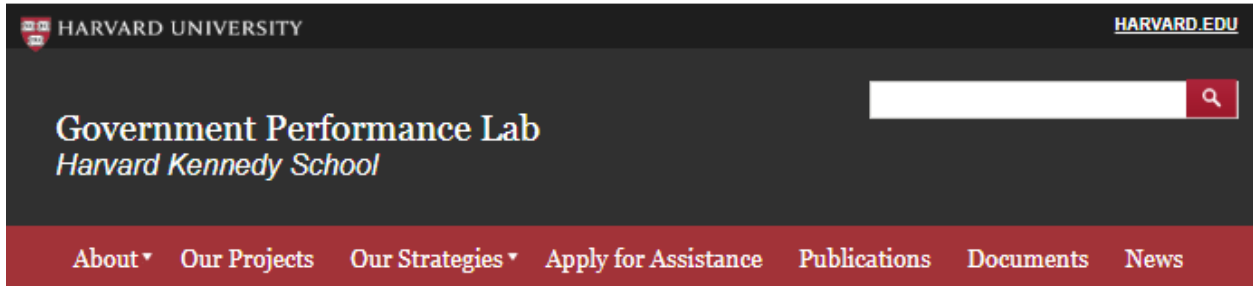
   The vendor and the State recognize that regular reviews of and conversations around performance, results and data, particularly related to the defined performance objectives, will allow the State and vendors to employ real-time information to track performance, identify good practice, and swiftly, collaboratively, and effectively address any challenges experienced by vendors, the State, or the users of this contracted product or service.

Available at: https://www.purchasing.ri.gov/StateAgencyInfoCenter/AgencyLogin.aspx

Examples of RFPs, RFIs, and Contracts

Examples of RFPs, RFIs, contracts, and other procurement-related documents can help agencies explore different procurement approaches and strategies and adopt those that would help achieve agency goals.

The Government Performance Lab's website is one source of examples; see the "Documents" page at http://govlab.hks.harvard.edu

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ABOUT THIS PLAYBOOK

Rhode Island Division of Purchases and Harvard Kennedy School Government Performance Lab

Since 2015, the Harvard Kennedy School Government Performance Lab (GPL) has provided technical assistance to help Rhode Island state agencies improve the outcomes of select social services programs. Through this work, the GPL has identified a common set of challenges agencies often face around improving the quality of procurements and contracts.

The GPL and the Rhode Island Division of Purchases provided targeted procurement assistance to state agencies from 2017-2018 in order to improve contract outcomes and generate strategies for assisting agencies in the future. The coaching pilot included teaching procurement and contracting best practices, assisting agency staff in applying these practices to real-time priority procurements, and creating supporting materials to make it easier for agency staff to execute quality procurement on their own. This playbook reflects many of the most important insights from the pilot regarding how to structure and conduct procurement coaching. This resource is meant to serve as a guide for both agencies themselves seeking to improve the quality of their procurements and contracts, as well as those that offer assistance to those agencies.

This playbook was primarily authored by Kate Mertz at the GPL, with oversight by State Purchasing Agent Nancy McIntyre and input from staff at the Division of Purchases, the Department of Administration, and other state agencies.

For more resources on improving the results of contracted services in state and local governments, visit the GPL's website at govlab.hks.harvard.edu.

Playbook originally published in June 2018.