

RFQ Questions and Fine Wine

“RFP questions are not like fine wine. They do not improve with age.”

That’s one of the Rules of Procurement <https://timmit.ca/tools/lib/trop.shtml>. But what does it mean?

You have crafted the perfect request for proposal (RFP) and put it on the street. You sit back and smile in anticipation of the manageable number of top-notch proposals (not too many, not too few) that you will soon have in hand, and how well the contract will go once you’ve selected the top scorer.

But then several weeks before closing, someone asks a question. Questioning your perfect RFP! You feel more than just a twinge of annoyance. Now what?

Relax! A question is a positive indication that at least someone is actually reading your RFP. Questions usually fall into these general categories.

- **Question to which the answer is already in the RFP.** Clearly the person asking the question did not read the whole document. Is that because they were careless? Maybe they were confused. Consider the possibility that your RFP is really complicated with relevant info widely scattered. This is not infrequent in RFPs from large organizations who have applied patch upon patch to their RFP templates to cover every possible circumstance (many of which may be irrelevant to the RFP at hand) without any thought to the poor proponent trying to digest it all in preparing a proposal. But in any case, there is not much you can do about that with the RFP still open other than to provide the RFP reference that answers the question.
- **Question about a minor contradiction or obscurity.** This might spring from artifacts of your RFP editing process where you changed one instance but not another related instance or overlooked some small bit of information that is essential in preparing a proposal. You should be glad of the opportunity to correct this. So, cheerfully provide the update and carry on.
- **Major question about key RFP content.** This is much more serious. If everything is there but just not very clear, provide a detailed explanation. But if the question points out major oversights in process or deliverables, or logic faults and trade agreement issues with the evaluation, for example, you have probably just blown your credibility with your potential proponents. The way in which you fix this is critical in restoring confidence. Do it quickly and completely considering what the proponent really needs to know, not just what they asked. Also give serious consideration to extending the closing date.

When you receive a question, don’t respond directly to the person who asked it. Instead, answer the RFP question in an official addendum that you issue to all the plan holders. This will give everyone access to the same info at more or less the same time. Fairness and impartiality are critical to your credibility as a good organization that contractors want to work for.

Your addenda will cover these types of information, examples of which are shown in the sample addendum at the end of this article.

- **Answers to questions.** Give the question (feel free to paraphrase and correct grammar) without indicating who asked it. Then follow with a clear, complete answer. Number the questions with a single sequence for the procurement to make things easy for later reference. For example, if you answer two questions in Addendum 1, they would be Question 1 and Question 2. If you answer two more questions in Addendum 2, they would be Question 3 and Question 4.
- **Changes to RFP text.** Change RFP content by deleting text and replacing it with different text. Never update text at less than paragraph level even if you're only changing a single date or quantity in that paragraph. Number the changes with a single sequence across all addenda for the procurement just as you did for questions.

Sometimes a question will also result in a change to the RFP text. Include both the question and the change in the addendum, and cross-reference the answer to the change.

Speed is essential in answering RFP questions. Why?

- Your potential proponents are working on tight schedules and probably have many other things to do. If they don't see an answer right away, they may consider you to be badly organized and turn their attention to better clients.
- If your answer to the question results in a major RFP change, it might require proponents to start over in writing their proposals. You want to give them as much time as reasonably possible to prepare quality proposals. That's why after a major change, you should also seriously consider extending the closing date without being asked.

Organize yourself to be able to issue an **addendum within 24 hours** of receiving a question. Even faster would be better so this is not the time to be away from the office. This quick turnaround is not unreasonable or impossible. Even if you cannot track down the answer that fast, issue an addendum anyway giving the question and an estimated date when you will be able provide the answer. Just knowing that the question has been asked is frequently very useful information to everyone, even those who didn't ask it. And then make sure you actually answer the question when you said you would. Again, sooner would be better. Be mindful of how all this fits into your closing date and any earlier time constraints on questions or addenda.

So, RFP questions are thus *not* like fine wine at all. Consume them immediately for the best quality and to preserve the reputation of your fine establishment.

Contact TimmiT if you find yourself struggling with RFP questions or fine wine.

See the examples in the sample addendum on the next page.

SAMPLE ADDENDUM

RFP name: Acronym Resource Management System (ARMS), RFP 2022-007

Addendum number: 3

Addendum date: February 29, 2022

Addendum scope:

This addendum covers Questions 4–6 and Change 5. Previous Addenda 1 and 2 covered Questions 1–3 and Changes 1–4. [This context helps proponents see if they have missed any previous addenda.]

Question 4: How many training days do you require?

Answer 4: See para 27.2 in the RFP. [Answer already exists in RFP.]

Question 5: Para 93.5.4 in the RFP says that you will accept either an on-premises or a cloud-hosted solution. How do we structure our proposal to offer both possibilities, and how would you score such a proposal for both approaches?

Answer 5: If you wish to propose both on-premises and cloud-hosted solutions, submit two complete proposals, one for each. We will evaluate each proposal separately on its own merits according to the evaluation criteria in Section 5 of the RFP. [Answer is clarification but there is no need to change the RFP.]

Question 6: Could you extend the closing date by two weeks due to climate-change induced weather patterns affecting the proposal process?

Answer 6: Yes, see Change 5 below. [Question triggers a change to the RFP text and the answer is cross-referenced to that change.]

Change 5: This changes the last date for questions and the closing date for this RFP. [Context is to assist proponents.]

Delete current para 32.9.6:

~~32.9.6. The last date for questions is March 25, 2022. The closing date is April 1, 2022. [This is the complete text of the paragraph in the original RFP. Strikethrough font helps emphasize that this text is being deleted.]~~

Insert new para 32.9.6:

32.9.6. The last date for questions is Apr 8, 2022. The closing date is April 15, 2022.