

The easy way to do RFP weighted scoring

Request for proposal (RFP) scoring isn't high on most people's list of favorite pastimes ... but it's far too important to ignore if you want to effectively evaluate vendors. To get RFP scoring right, you have to consider:

- What you want to score in your RFP responses (priorities and requirements)
- How you're going to score the vendor requirements (type of scale, weight)
- Who is going to do the scoring (team and resources)

Luckily, we've compiled tips and resources you can use to simplify the RFP scoring process.

1. Decide if you need an RFP or an RFI
2. Develop your vendor scoring criteria
3. Incorporate technology into your vendor selection process
4. Create your RFP scorecard: Templates and examples

1. Decide if you need an RFP or an RFI

We find people mostly get into scoring problems when they're not exactly sure what kind of information they want from vendors. Which is why the first step to vendor scoring is understanding the difference between an RFP and an RFI.

An RFI is:

- High-level, general information
- Usually the first step in the RFP process
- Used when purchasers aren't quite sure what they're looking for

An RFP is:

- Full of specific questions
- Based on detailed criteria
- Should be used when you're open to vendor's suggestions

Which do you need? A simple litmus test is if you want general information, and you want it from more than, say, 10 vendors, you should probably send an RFI first.

Issue a high-level RFI to a broad range of candidates with the goal of quickly excluding solutions that won't work for you. Ask the critical questions which will immediately eliminate unsuitable providers and identify those that are eligible for the next round.

Once you've clarified what you're looking for and have your list of viable options, you're ready to write your targeted RFP. But *before you write any questions*, determine your scoring criteria.

2. Develop your vendor scoring criteria

Gather all your key stakeholders — including end users, IT, finance, etc. — and ask everyone to list the requirements that are most important to them. Start with questions like:

- What's our definition of success?
- What are the biggest factors in determining success?
- What are the categories we need to judge solutions against?
- How important is each category? For example, functionality is worth 50 percent, security is worth 25 percent and speed to implementation is worth 25 percent
- Should pricing be a weighted factor?



Then, use your answers to prioritize needs. We suggest using the following categories:

Features and functionality

Decide which capabilities you can't live without and which would simply be nice to have.

Price

Do some research to determine the average cost of the products and services you're seeking. Then, determine your budget. Are you going for the cheapest option available, or are you willing to spend a bit more to get exactly what you need?

Implementation

How quickly do you need to have your solution up and running? Are you willing to invest more time to get the right solution, or do you need to address the problem within the next few weeks?

Customer service

Make sure you're evaluating whether a new vendor would be willing to support you in the way that works best for your organization. Will you be happy if they only offer support by phone, email, ticket system or chat? Or do they need to offer a specific combination of those options? How long are you willing to wait to resolve an outstanding issue?

Innovative or proven solution

Are you willing to go with a new vendor that's trying to push the bounds of what technology can offer today, or would you prefer to go with a safer option, that has reliably helped its users overcome similar challenges?

Finally, you should assign each section and question a weight, based on how important it is to your organization.

3. Incorporate technology into your vendor selection process

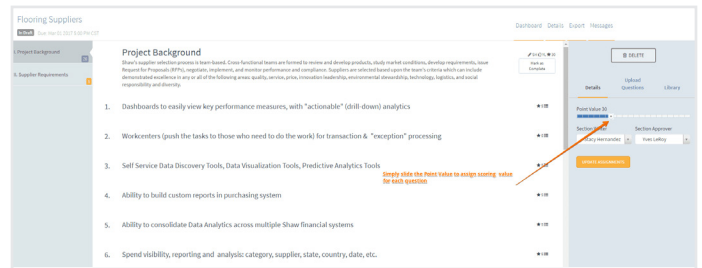
Everyone agrees raw data isn't helpful if you can't effectively interpret it, and RFPs are no different. So, if you want to make things really easy, think about investing in RFP software.

Not sure you want to pay for specialized RFP software? Consider this big advantage: You don't have to compile manual spreadsheets. That means no complicated weighted-decision template matrix, macros, complex formulas or miscalculations.

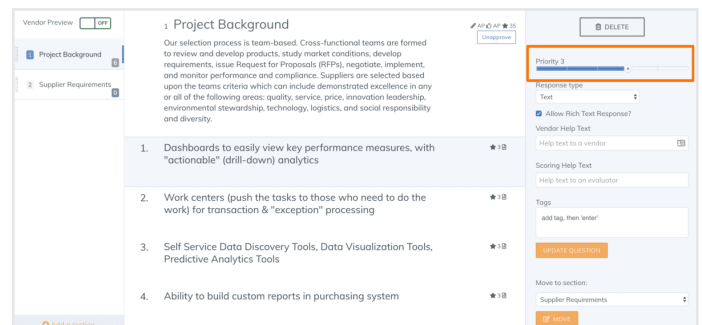
For example, RFP360 offers built-in algorithms that make it easy to score individual questions (not just sections). This results in a more accurate overall score, giving you a shorter evaluation time, fewer opportunities for human error and clearer vendor comparisons.

To ensure proper weighting, simply adjust each section's weight from zero to 100 using a slider.

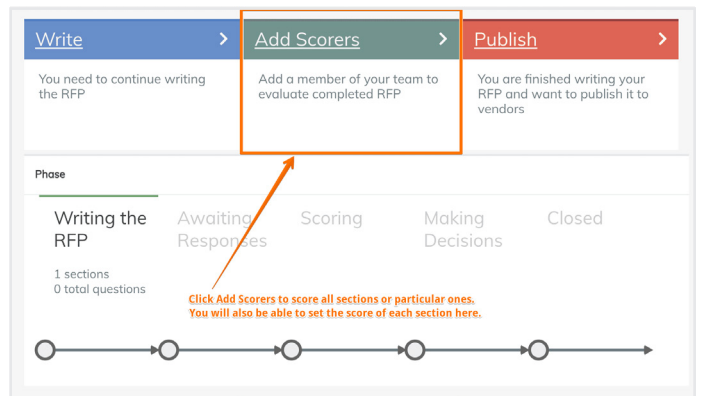
Note: When using RFP360, you don't need to worry about your weight adding up to 100 percent. Just give the relative point value for each section, and the algorithm will take care of the rest.



You can also adjust the weight of each question on a scale of zero to five.



You can even assign scorers by section, ensuring members of your RFP team who have specialized knowledge weigh in on their areas of expertise, and only their areas of expertise.



Finally, once you and your team have scored all RFP responses, you can compare each vendor side by side.

"It has what I call the heat map," said Kelly Ellis, director of administration and operational excellence at **Piper Jordan**.

"It shows you question by question and section by section how the scoring matches up. We actually use that in our presentation decks because it gives the client a great way to see where vendors scored well and where they came up short."

4. Create your RFP scorecard

It may sound obvious, but one of the best ways to keep the vendor scorecard simple is to create a shortlist of invited vendors. We prefer capping our RFPs at about five vendors, and asking **20 questions or less**. While it may seem awfully concise, it still means each evaluator has to judge and weigh 100 individual responses.

Of course, keeping your RFP scorecard concise is only the start.

The checklist below offers 10 best practices to follow when creating your RFP scoring sheet.



Weighted scoring checklist

- Remember, it's worth the work – less subjective
- Ask if an RFI is a better first step than an RFP
- Identify scoring criteria before sending the RFP
- Keep number of invited vendors manageable
- Set weights on sections and individual questions
- Use simple weights, like a 0-5 scale or 0-10 scale
- Score questions one at a time
- Compare responses apples to apples
- Make justification notes as you score
- Use pattern of responses and total score to make your selection

For a more in-depth look at how to create an effective RFP scorecard, let's break down a few templates and examples.

Weighted decision matrix: EPM

Criteria	Weighting	OPTIONS					
		Company A		Company B		Company C	
		Score	Total	Score	Total	Score	Total
Cost	5	5	25	3	15	4	20
Service Level	4	3	12	5	20	2	8
Ease of Termination	4	2	8	5	20	5	20
Contract Length	2	4	8	4	8	3	6
Financial Strength	3	4	12	5	15	3	9
TOTAL:			65		78		63

Expert Program Management (EPM) created this weighted decision matrix. They explain that it covers an example where a business is evaluating facilities management providers.

As you can see in the weighing column, they placed the greatest value on cost, followed by service level and ease of termination. Finally, they also considered contract length and financial strength.

Here's what they say about the results:

“Because our most important factor was cost, we might expect the company with the lowest cost to be our preferred option. Interestingly, in the above example, it is actually the company with the highest cost that comes out on top in our decision matrix.

“This is because this company scores much better in all other factors than the cheapest company, meaning this company has a very high service level and is the easiest contract to cancel if things aren't working out.”

Weighted criteria matrix: GoLeanSixSigma.com

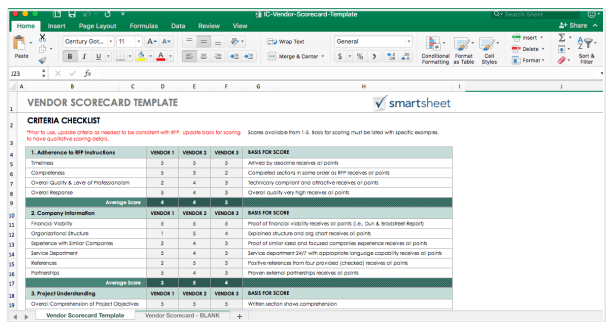
Prioritization Criteria	Value	Option 1	Score	Option 2	Score	Option 3	Score	Option 4	Score
			0		0		0		0
			0		0		0		0
			0		0		0		0
			0		0		0		0
			0		0		0		0
			0		0		0		0
			0		0		0		0
			0		0		0		0
			0		0		0		0
Totals			0		0		0		0

This weighted criteria matrix from GoLeanSixSigma.com contains both a fillable template, as well as an example of how the matrix should look once completed.

Below, they explain its use:

“A weighted criteria Matrix is a decision-making tool that evaluates potential options against a list of weighted factors. Common uses include deciding between optional solutions or choosing the most appropriate software application to purchase.”

Vendor scorecard template: Smartsheet



This vendor scorecard template from Smartsheet evaluates vendors based on eight criteria:

1. Adherence to RFP instructions
2. Company information
3. Project understanding
4. Requirements
5. Product viability & history
6. Terms & conditions
7. Vendor demonstration
8. Fee summary

It includes one tab that demonstrates how the scorecard should look once completed, as well as a separate blank tab you can use to evaluate your potential vendors.

RFP evaluation scoring sheet: Minnesota Department of Transportation

RFP Evaluation Scoring Sheet				
Evaluation Factor	Points	Proposer Company		
Technical Ability (40%)				
<i>Evaluate this factor based on your review of the technical proposals distributed by the City Clerk.</i>				
1. Qualifications (20%)	20			
2. Proposed Personnel (20%)	20			
3. Transition Plan (10%)	10			
4. Proposed Management and Operations Plan (20%)	20			
5. Risks and Added Value Assessment (10%)	10			
6. Proposed Maintenance and Equipment Plan (20%)	20			
Subtotal - Technical	100			
Past Performance (20%)				
<i>Evaluate this factor based interviews with references that will be provided by the technical assistance consultant.</i>				
Reference Checks	50			
Subtotal - Past Performance	50			
Financial Ability (10%)				
<i>Evaluate this factor based on report to be prepared by the City Finance Department.</i>				
Financial Ability and Risk Ranking	25			
Subtotal - Past Performance	25			
Interviews with Key Staff (30%)				
<i>Evaluate this factor based on vendor interviews.</i>				
Interviews with Key Management Staff	75			
Subtotal - Interviews	75			
Total - All Evaluation Points	250			
Reviewer Name:	_____	Title:	_____	

The Minnesota Department of Transportation's [RFP evaluation scoring sheet](#) is designed to ensure they select contract operators “based on a competitively negotiated method of procurement.”

RFP evaluation scorecard: University of Wisconsin-Madison, Division of Business Services

NAME OF BIDDER:	Score Unsatisfactory 0 pts	Score Satisfactory 1 pt	Score Good 2 pts	Score Very Good 3 pts	Score Excellent 4 pts	Score Outstanding 5 pts	Multiplier	Points Awarded (mark score from (0-5 and multiply by multiplier)	Maximum Points Available (5 x multiplier)
RFP TITLE:									
NAME OF REVIEWER:									
EVALUATION CRITERIA LISTING									
EXAMPLE - 1						XX	(x 5)	25	25
EXAMPLE - 2				XX			(x 2)	6	10
EXAMPLE - 3			XX				(x 1)	2	5
1.							(x _)		
2.							(x _)		
3.							(x _)		
4.							(x _)		
5.							(x _)		
6.							(x _)		
7.							(x _)		
8.							(x _)		
9.							(x _)		
10.							(x _)		
Comments on individual score selections or general comments during review of response:									

The University of Wisconsin-Madison, Division of Business Services, created this [RFP evaluation scorecard](#). They offer the following instructions for use:

“Before giving to reviewers the procurement team leader should enter each evaluation criteria to be scored in first column and indicate the priority level under the ‘multiplier’ column. The evaluation criteria with the highest priority will have the highest multiplier, e.g., ‘x 10’ and the lowest priority criteria will have the lowest multiplier, e.g., ‘x 1’. Multiply the multiplier by ‘5’ to obtain the highest number of points for each criteria (since ‘5’ is the highest score).

“Reviewers must check one score (0-5) for each criteria. Multiplying the marked score by the multiplier will result in the total points awarded for that criterion.”

Vendor scorecard: MediaPro

SELECTION CRITERIA	WEIGHTED %	WEIGHTED SCORE	MEDIAPRO	CANDIDATE #2	CANDIDATE #3
Overall Vendor Score: Rate each vendor	100%	220	220	0	0
ADMIN FUNCTIONS	55%	122	122	0	0
CONFIGURATION	8%	17	17	0	0
Does the vendor's solution allow you to apply your company logo and colors at no additional cost?		2	Fully		
Does the vendor's solution provide the ability to automatically deploy content for the next 12 months, if desired?		2	Fully		
Does the vendor's solution regularly provide new content specifically crafted for your industry?		6	Fully		
Does the vendor provide regular updates to ensure the content stays current (i.e. up-to-date information, industry best-practices, and regulations, in the last 12 months)?		5	Fully		
Does the vendor offer a configurable, drag-and-drop style program roadmap?		2	Fully		

MediaPro created this [vendor selection scorecard](#) to “help security and privacy program administrators who are developing new employee awareness initiatives or want to enhance existing ones to help their organizations address the risks that employees pose to their company.”

They go on to explain that the scorecard “assists in rating, analyzing and comparing core features and functionalities offered by potential awareness program vendors as they make an informed selection.”

Using an RFP scoring template to select a vendor

Once you get a weighted RFP score, do you have to choose the supplier with the highest score? The short answer is no.

According to Procurement Pro Phil Ideson of [Art of Procurement](#) and [Palambride](#):

“Recognize that the supplier that you end up selecting may not be the one that scores the best on the weighted scoring algorithm. Because there are things that are a bit more subjective that do play a big role in selecting your final supplier.

“When you’re looking at commoditized products and services there has to be a reason why you’re not selecting the highest-scored supplier. I’d suggest that if there is a good reason you don’t choose them in that instance your weighting was flawed. You didn’t reflect what it was you actually needed in the weighting. Because obviously there was a disconnect between the final scores and who you actually chose. Or, it could be that you haven’t built the discipline among your team to recognize the importance of doing it this way. So, they see it as being a ‘check the boxes exercise.’ But they still want to go with who they want to go with.”

Simply put, there will be times when you don’t select the highest-scored candidate. But you may also want to revisit your selection criteria.

RFP scoring example

A couple of years ago when we issued an RFP for a public relations consultant, we actually chose the second-highest-scored provider. Why? We couldn’t swallow the price tag of the top candidate. So, we chose the second-tiered supplier because the difference in points wasn’t high enough to overcome the price discrepancy.

When you should choose the highest-scored provider:

- When the highest score is the key decision-makers’ explicit selection criteria
- When your team has thoughtfully prepped and agreed upon your scoring criteria

When you have to think twice about choosing the highest-scored provider:

- If it’s a commodity purchase, and the only true consideration is price
- Your incumbent was second in line, but your history with them tipped the scale
- It was difficult to score the project — it was too high level or open-ended

Of course, as with all [RFP best practices and guidelines](#), take it with a grain of salt. Each industry, organization and RFP is unique.



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