**Section 500.310 Competitive Sealed Bidding**

a) Application

Competitive sealed bidding is the required method of source selection except as allowed by this Part. The provisions of this Section apply to every procurement required to be conducted by competitive sealed bidding.

b) The Invitation for Bids

1) Use. The Invitation for Bids (IFB) is used to initiate a competitive sealed bid procurement.

2) Content. The IFB shall include, at a minimum, the following:

A) instructions and information to bidders concerning the bid submission requirements, including the time and date set for receipt of bids, the address of the office to which bids are to be delivered, and the maximum time for bid acceptance;

B) the purchase description, evaluation factors, delivery or performance schedule, and such inspection and acceptance requirements as are not included in the purchase description; and

C) the contract terms and conditions, including warranty and bonding or other security requirements, as applicable.

3) Incorporation by Reference. The IFB may incorporate documents by reference provided that the IFB specifies where such documents can be obtained.

c) Bidding Time

Bidding time is the period of time between the date of notice or distribution of the IFB and the time and date set for receipt of bids. In each case, bidding time will be set to provide bidders a reasonable time to prepare their bids. A minimum of 14 calendar days shall be provided unless a shorter time is authorized by this Part.

d) Bidder Submissions

Bid Form. The IFB may include a form or format for submitting bids. If a form or format is specified, vendor shall submit bids as instructed.

e) Public Notice

1) Publication. Every new procurement for supplies and services in excess of the small purchase amount that must be procured using an IFB shall be publicized in the Auditor General Bulletin at least 14 calendar days before the date set for bid opening.

2) Public Availability. A copy of the IFB shall be made available for public inspection.

3) Distribution. IFBs or Notices of the Availability of Invitations for Bids may be mailed or otherwise furnished to a sufficient number of bidders for the purpose of securing competition. Notices of Availability shall, at a minimum, indicate where the IFB may be obtained, generally describe what is needed, and indicate the due date for bids. Where appropriate, the Procurement Officer may require payment of a fee or a deposit for supplying the IFB.

f) Pre-Bid Conference

Pre-bid conferences may be conducted to enhance understanding of the procurement requirements. The pre-bid conference shall be announced as part of the IFB or, if the IFB has been issued, to all prospective bidders known to have received an IFB. The conference may be designated as attendance mandatory or attendance optional. The conference should be held long enough after the IFB has been issued to allow bidders to become familiar with it, but sufficiently before bid opening to allow consideration of the conference results in preparation of bids. Nothing stated at the pre-bid conference shall change the IFB unless a change is made by written amendment to the IFB.

g) Amendments to Invitations for Bids

1) Form. Amendments to IFBs shall be clearly identified and shall reference the portion of the IFB being amended.

2) Distribution. Amendments shall be made available to all prospective bidders known to have received an IFB or, if a conference was held and attendance was mandatory, only to those prospective bidders who attended.

3) Timeliness. Amendments shall be made available within a reasonable time to allow prospective bidders to consider them in preparing their bids. If the time and date set for receipt of bids will not permit such preparation, the amendment shall extend the response time. If necessary, the response time may be extended by e-mail, fax or telephone and confirmed in the amendment.

h) Pre-Opening Modification or Withdrawal of Bids

1) Procedure. Bids may be modified or withdrawn by written notice received in the office designated in the IFB prior to the time and date set for bid opening.

2) Disposition of Bid Security. If a bid is withdrawn in accordance with this Section, the bid security, if any, shall be returned to the bidder.

3) Records. All documents relating to the modification or withdrawal of bids shall be made a part of the appropriate procurement file.

i) Receipt, Opening and Recording of Bids

1) Receipt. Upon its receipt, each bid and modification shall be time-stamped but not opened and shall be stored in a secure place until the time and date set for bid opening. If a bid is opened in error, the file shall so state.

2) Opening and Recording

A) Bids and modifications shall be opened publicly at the time, date, and place designated in the IFB. Opening shall be witnessed by a State employee or any other person present, but the person opening bids shall not serve as witness. The name of each bidder, the bid price, and such other information as is deemed appropriate by the Procurement Officer shall be recorded and the name of each bidder read aloud or otherwise made available. The name of the witness shall also be recorded at the opening.

B) All bids, except as otherwise provided in subsection (i)(3) of this Section, and the bid record, shall be available for public inspection after award.

3) Confidential Data. The Procurement Officer shall examine the bids to determine the validity of any written requests for nondisclosure of trade secrets or other proprietary data. If the parties do not agree as to the disclosure of data or other information, the bid shall be rejected as nonresponsive.

j) Bid Evaluation and Award

1) General. The contract is to be awarded to the lowest responsible and responsive bidder whose bid meets the requirements and criteria set forth in the IFB, except as permitted by this Part. The IFB shall set forth the requirements and criteria that will be used to determine the lowest responsive bidder. No bid shall be evaluated for any requirements or criteria that are not disclosed in the IFB.

2) Responsibility. Responsibility of prospective vendors is covered by Section 500.430 (Responsibility) of this Part.

3) Responsiveness. A bid must conform in all material respects to the IFB.

A) Product or Service Acceptability. The IFB shall set forth any evaluation criteria to be used in determining product or service acceptability. It may require the submission of bid samples, descriptive literature, technical data, references, licenses, or other information or material. It may also provide for accomplishing any of the following prior to award:

i) inspection or testing of a product or service prior to award for such characteristics as quality or workmanship;

ii) examination of such elements as appearance, finish, taste, or feel;

iii) other examinations to determine whether it conforms with any other purchase description requirements.

B) The acceptability evaluation is not conducted for the purpose of determining whether one bidder's product or service capability is superior to another, but only to determine that a bidder's offering is acceptable as set forth in the IFB. Any bidder's offering that does not meet the acceptability requirements shall be rejected.

4) Determination of Lowest Bidder. Following determination of product or service acceptability as set forth in this subsection (j), bids will be evaluated to determine which bidder offers the lowest cost to the OAG in accordance with the evaluation criteria set forth in the IFB. Only objectively measurable criteria that are set forth in the IFB shall be applied in determining the lowest bidder. Examples of such criteria include, but are not limited to, transportation cost, administrative cost, and ownership or life-cycle cost formulas. Evaluation factors need not be precise predictors of actual future costs, but to the extent possible such evaluation factors shall be reasonable estimates based upon information the OAG has available concerning future use and shall provide for the equitable treatment of all bids.

5) Price Negotiation. Negotiations are permitted with the low bidder to obtain a lower price for the item bid.

k) Documentation of Award

Following award, a record showing the successful bidder shall be made a part of the procurement file.

l) Award to Other Than Low Bidder

1) The Procurement Officer may award to other than the lowest responsible and responsive bidder upon a written determination that award to another bidder is in the State's best interest. A description of the agency's needs, a determination that the anticipated cost will be fair and reasonable, a listing of all responsible and responsive bidders, and the name of the bidder selected, pricing, and the reasons for selecting this bidder instead of the low bidder must be published in the Auditor General Bulletin.

2) This action may be appropriate when the difference in quality or speed of delivery is so great as compared to the difference in price, and considering the OAG's needs, that a best value award is justified. However, if the difference in price is significant, the Procurement Officer may not utilize this provision.

m) Publicizing Award

The successful bidder shall be notified of award and such notification may be in the form of a letter, purchase order or other clear communication. Notice of award shall be issued by either paper or electronic means to all offerors submitting responses to the solicitation and published in the Auditor General Bulletin prior to contract execution.

(Source: Amended at 39 Ill. Reg. 3561, effective March 1, 2015)