



INSTRUCTIONS TO VENDORS (DHHS)

READ, REVIEW AND COMPLY: It shall be the Vendor's responsibility to read this entire document, review all enclosures and attachments, and any addenda, and comply with all requirements specified, regardless of whether appearing in these Instructions to Vendors or elsewhere in the solicitation document.

Any gender-specific pronouns used herein, whether masculine or feminine, shall be read and construed as gender neutral, and the singular of any word or phrase shall be read to include the plural and vice versa.

REQUEST FOR OFFERS

Vendors are cautioned that this is a request for *offers*, not an offer or request to *contract*, and the State reserves the unqualified right to reject any and all bids at any time if such rejection is deemed to be in the best interest of the State.

By submitting Your Bid or Proposal, You are offering to enter into a contract with the State.

The contract is a separate document that represents the Vendor's and the State's entire agreement. If your bid is accepted and results in a contract award you will be expected to accept [NORTH CAROLINA'S GENERAL TERMS AND CONDITIONS](#) as part of the contract. Dependent upon the product or service being offered, other terms and conditions may apply.

DUTY TO INQUIRE

Offeror, by submitting an Offer, represents that it has read and understands the Solicitation and that its Offer is made in compliance with the Solicitation. Offerors are expected to examine the Solicitation thoroughly and should request an explanation of any ambiguities, discrepancies, errors, omissions, or conflicting statements in the Solicitation. Failure to do so will be at the Offeror's risk. All ambiguities, discrepancies, errors, omissions, or conflicting statements in the Solicitation shall be interpreted to require the better quality or greater quantity of work and/or materials, unless otherwise directed by amendment. Offeror assumes responsibility for any patent ambiguity in the Solicitation that Offeror does not bring to the State's attention.

DEFINITIONS, ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

The following definitions, acronyms, and abbreviations may be used within the bid document. Please refer to this list for meaning as you review the bid document and complete your bid.

- a) **AGENCY SPECIFIC TERM CONTRACT:** A contract generally intended to cover all normal requirements for a commodity for a specified period of time based on estimated quantities for a single entity.
 - b) **AMENDMENT:** a document issued to supplement the original solicitation document
 - c) **BAFO:** Best and Final Offer, submitted by a Vendor to alter its initial bid, made in response to a request by the issuing agency.
 - d) **BUYER:** The employee of the State or Other Eligible Entity that places an order with the Vendor.
 - e) **COMMUNITY COLLEGE:** Any of the fifty-eight (58) public North Carolina Community Colleges.
 - f) **CONTRACT LEAD:** Representative of the AGENCY identified on the first page of this solicitation document who will correspond with potential Vendors concerning solicitation issues and will contract with the Vendor providing the best offer to the State, and is the individual who
-

- will administer The Contract for the State.
- g) **E-PROCUREMENT SERVICES:** The program, system, and associated services through which the State conducts electronic procurement.
 - h) **FOB-DESTINATION:** Title changes hand from Vendor to purchaser at the destination point of the shipment; Vendor owns commodity in transit and files any claims, and Vendor pays all freight and any related transportation charges. A solicitation may request a Vendor to separately identify freight charges in its bid, but no amount or charge not included as part of the total bid price will be paid.
 - i) **IFB:** Invitation for Bids (a type of solicitation document)
 - j) **IPS:** Interactive Purchasing Service
 - k) **LOT:** A grouping of similar products within this solicitation document.
 - l) **OFFER:** the bid or proposal submitted in response this solicitation. The terms Bid and Proposal are used interchangeably with the term Offer.
 - m) **OFFEROR:** the single legal entity submitting the offer. The term Bidder is used interchangeably with the term Offeror. See bidding provisions entitled Signing Your Offer and Bid/Proposal As Offer To Contract.
 - n) **ON-TIME DELIVERY:** The delivery of all items within a single order to the receiving point designated by the ordering entity within the delivery time required.
 - o) **QUALIFIED BID/PROPOSAL:** A responsive bid submitted by a responsible Vendor.
 - p) **RESPONSIBLE:** Refers to a vendor who demonstrates in its Offer that it has the capability to perform the requirements of the solicitation.
 - q) **RESPONSIVE:** Refers to an Offer that conforms to the Requirements of the solicitation in all respects to be considered by the State for award.
 - r) **RFI:** Request for Information (a type of solicitation document that does not result in a contract)
 - s) **RFP:** Request for Proposals (a type of solicitation document)
 - t) **RF PQ:** Request for Pre-Qualifications (a type of solicitation document)
 - u) **RFQ:** Request for Quotes (a type of solicitation document); in the eProcurement system, RFQs are received through the Collaborative Requisitioning process
 - v) **STATE:** The State of North Carolina, including any of its sub-units recognized under North Carolina law.
 - w) **STATE AGENCY:** Any of the more than 400 sub-units within the executive branch of the State, including its departments, boards, commissions, institutions of higher education and other institutions.
 - x) **STATE DEPARTMENTS:** Department of Administration, Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Department of Commerce, Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, Department of Environmental Quality, Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Information Technology, Department of Insurance, Department of Justice, Department of Labor, Department of Military and Veteran Affairs, Department of Public Instruction, Department of Public Safety, Department of Revenue, Department of State Treasurer, Office of the Secretary of the State, Department of Transportation, Wildlife Resources Commission, Office of Budget and Management, Office of the Governor, Office of the Lieutenant Governor, Office of The State Auditor, Office of the State Controller.
 - y) **THE CONTRACT:** A contract resulting from or arising out of Vendor responses to this solicitation document.
 - z) **VENDOR:** Supplier, bidder, proposer, company, firm, corporation, partnership, individual or other entity submitting a response to a Solicitation document. Following award of a contract, the term refers to an entity receiving such an award.
 - aa) **WORK:** All labor, materials, equipment, services, or property of any type, provided or to be provided by the Contractor to fulfill the Contractor's obligations under the Contract.
 - bb) **YOU and YOUR:** Offeror.
-

INTERPRETATION OF TERMS AND PHRASES

The solicitation document serves to advise potential Vendors of the parameters of the solution being sought by the Department. The use of phrases such as “shall,” “must,” and “requirements” are intended to create enforceable contract conditions. In determining whether bids should be evaluated or rejected, the Department will take into consideration the degree to which Vendors have proposed or failed to propose solutions that will satisfy the Department’s needs as described in the Solicitation document. Except as specifically stated in the Solicitation document, no one requirement shall automatically disqualify a Vendor from consideration. However, failure to comply with any single requirement, if determined to be essential under the circumstances then existing, may result in the Department exercising its discretion to reject a bid in its entirety.

BID SUBMISSION

1. **VENDOR’S REPRESENTATIVE:** Each Vendor shall submit with its bid the name, address, and telephone number of the person(s) with authority to bind the firm and answer questions or provide clarification concerning the firm's bid.
 2. **SIGNING YOUR OFFER:** Every Offer must be signed by an individual with actual authority to bind the Offeror. (a) If the Offeror is an individual, the Offer must be signed by that individual. If the Offeror is an individual doing business as a firm, the Offer must be submitted in the firm name, signed by the individual, and state that the individual is doing business as a firm. (b) If the Offeror is a partnership, the Offer must be submitted in the partnership name, followed by the words by its Partner, and signed by a general partner. (c) If the Offeror is a corporation, the Offer must be submitted in the corporate name, followed by the signature and title of the person authorized to sign. (d) An Offer may be submitted by a joint venturer involving any combination of individuals, partnerships, or corporations. If the Offeror is a joint venture, the Offer must be submitted in the name of the Joint Venture and signed by every participant in the joint venture in the manner prescribed in paragraphs (a) through (c) above for each type of participant. (e) If an Offer is signed by an agent, other than as stated in subparagraphs (a) through (d) above, the Offer must state that it has been signed by an Agent. Upon request, Offeror must provide proof of the agent's authorization to bind the principal.
 3. **EXECUTION:** Failure to sign the Execution Page (numbered page 1 of the solicitation document) in the indicated space may render bid non-responsive, and it may be rejected.
 4. **STATE OFFICE CLOSINGS:** If an emergency or unanticipated event interrupts normal government processes so that offers cannot be received at the State office designated for receipt of bids by the exact time specified in the solicitation, the time specified for receipt of offers will be deemed to be extended to the same time of day specified in the solicitation on the first work day on which normal government processes resume. In lieu of an automatic extension, an Amendment may be issued to reschedule bid opening. If State offices are closed at the time a pre-bid or pre-proposal conference is scheduled, an Amendment will be issued to reschedule the conference.
 5. **BID IN ENGLISH and DOLLARS:** Offers submitted in response to this solicitation shall be in the English language and in US dollars, unless otherwise permitted by the Solicitation.
 6. **LATE BIDS:** Late bids, regardless of cause, will not be opened or considered, and will automatically be disqualified from further consideration. It shall be the Vendor’s sole responsibility to ensure delivery at the designated office by the designated time.
 - Vendor shall bear the risk for late submission due to unintended or unanticipated delay—whether submitted electronically, delivered by hand, U.S. Postal Service, courier or other delivery service. It is the Vendor’s sole responsibility to ensure its bid has been submitted to this Office by the specified time and date of opening. The date and time of submission will
-

be marked on each bid when received, and any bid received after the bid submission deadline will be rejected.

- For proposals submitted via U.S. mail, please note that the U.S. Postal Service generally does not deliver mail to a specified street address but to the State's Mail Service Center. Vendors are cautioned that proposals sent via U.S. Mail, including Express Mail, may not be delivered by the Mail Service Center to the agency's purchasing office on the due date in time to meet the proposal deadline. All Vendors are urged to take the possibility of delay into account when submitting a proposal by U.S. Postal Service, courier, or other delivery service.
7. **DETERMINATION OF RESPONSIVENESS:** Any Offer which fails to conform to the material requirements of the Solicitation may be rejected as nonresponsive. Offers which impose conditions that modify material requirements of the Solicitation may be rejected. If a fixed price is required, an Offer will be rejected if the total possible cost to the State cannot be determined. Offerors will not be given an opportunity to correct any material nonconformity. Any deficiency resulting from a minor informality may be cured or waived at the sole discretion of the Procurement Officer.
 8. **CONTENTS OF OFFER:**
 - a) Offers should be complete and carefully worded and should convey all of the information requested.
 - b) Offers should be prepared simply and economically, providing a straightforward, concise description of offeror's capabilities to satisfy the requirements of the RFP. Emphasis should be on completeness and clarity of content.
 - c) If your offer includes any comment over and above the specific information requested in the solicitation, you are to include this information as a separate appendix to your offer. Offers which include either modifications to any of the solicitation's contractual requirements or an offeror's standard terms and conditions may be deemed non-responsive and not considered for award.
 9. **MULTIPLE OFFERS.** If specifically stated in the solicitation document, Offerors may submit more than one Offer, provided that each Offer has significant differences other than price. Each separate Offer must satisfy all Solicitation requirements.
 10. **CLARIFICATION:** The State may elect to communicate with you after opening for the purpose of clarifying either your offer or the requirements of the solicitation. Such communications may be conducted only with offerors who have submitted an offer which obviously conforms in all material aspects to the solicitation. Clarification of an offer must be documented in writing and included with the offer. Clarifications may not be used to revise an offer or the solicitation.
 11. **ACCEPTANCE AND REJECTION:** The State reserves the right to reject any and all bids, to waive any informality in bids and, unless otherwise specified by the Vendor, to accept any item in the bid. If either a unit price or an extended price is obviously in error and the other is obviously correct, the incorrect price will be disregarded. Regardless of error or omission, a Vendor shall not be permitted to increase its pricing after the deadline for submitting bids.
 12. **BASIS FOR REJECTION:** Pursuant to 01 NCAC 05B .0501, the State reserves the right to reject any and all offers, in whole or in part, by deeming the offer unsatisfactory as to quality or quantity, delivery, price or service offered, non-compliance with the requirements or intent of this solicitation, lack of competitiveness, error(s) in specifications or indications that revision would be advantageous to the State, cancellation or other changes in the intended project or any other determination that the proposed requirement is no longer needed, limitation or lack of available funds, circumstances that prevent determination of the best offer, or any other determination that rejection would be in the best interest of the State.
 13. **INFORMATION AND DESCRIPTIVE LITERATURE:** Vendor shall furnish all information requested in the spaces provided in the solicitation document. Further, if required elsewhere in this bid, each Vendor shall submit with its bid any sketches, descriptive literature and/or complete specifications
-

covering the products and services offered. Reference to literature submitted with a previous bid or available elsewhere will not satisfy this provision. **Do not submit bid samples or descriptive literature unless expressly requested.** Unsolicited bid samples or descriptive literature will not be examined or tested, will not be used to determine responsiveness, and will not be deemed to vary any of the provisions of the solicitation. Failure to comply with these requirements shall constitute sufficient cause to reject a bid without further consideration.

14. **WITHDRAWAL OF BID OR PROPOSAL**: Proposals submitted electronically may be withdrawn at any time prior to the date for opening proposals identified on the cover page of this solicitation documents (or such later date included in an Addendum). Proposals that have been delivered by hand, U.S. Postal Service, courier or other delivery service may be withdrawn **only** in writing and if receipt is acknowledged by the office issuing the solicitation document prior to the time for opening offers or proposals identified on the cover page of the solicitation document (or such later date included in an Addendum). Written withdrawal requests shall be submitted on the Vendor's letterhead and signed by an official of the Vendor authorized to make such request. Any withdrawal request made after the opening of proposals shall be allowed only for good cause shown and in the sole discretion of the Division of Purchase and Contract.
15. **COST FOR BID OR PROPOSAL PREPARATION**: Any costs incurred by Vendor in preparing or submitting offers are the Vendor's sole responsibility; the State of North Carolina will not reimburse any Vendor for any costs incurred prior to award.
16. **INSPECTION AT VENDOR'S SITE**: The State reserves the right to inspect, at a reasonable time, the equipment, item, plant or other facilities of a prospective Vendor prior to Contract award, and during the Contract term as necessary for the State's determination that such equipment, item, plant or other facilities conform with the specifications/requirements and are adequate and suitable for the proper and effective performance of the Contract.

NORTH CAROLINA REGULATIONS AND ORDERS

17. **EXECUTIVE ORDER 224 – IMPLEMENTING MEASURES TO ADDRESS COVID-19 AND RELATED VARIANTS**, issued July 29, 2021, requires vaccination and/or regular testing protocols from State Employees and Contractors. Effective immediately, *Attachment J: Contractor Vaccination/ Testing Requirements* must be incorporated into every solicitation.
 18. **RECYCLING AND SOURCE REDUCTION**: It is the policy of the State to encourage and promote the purchase of products with recycled content to the extent economically practicable, and to purchase items which are reusable, refillable, repairable, more durable and less toxic to the extent that the purchase or use is practicable and cost-effective. We also encourage and promote using minimal packaging and the use of recycled/recyclable products in the packaging of commodities purchased. However, no sacrifice in quality of packaging will be acceptable. The company remains responsible for providing packaging that will adequately protect the commodity and contain it for its intended use. Companies are strongly urged to bring to the attention of purchasers those products or packaging they offer which have recycled content and that are recyclable.
 19. **CERTIFICATE TO TRANSACT BUSINESS IN NORTH CAROLINA**: As a condition of contract award, each out-of-State Vendor that is a corporation, limited-liability company or limited-liability partnership shall have received, and shall maintain throughout the term of The Contract, a Certificate of Authority to Transact Business in North Carolina from the North Carolina Secretary of State, as required by North Carolina law. A State contract requiring only an isolated transaction completed within a period of six months, and not in the course of a number of repeated transactions of like nature, shall not be considered as transacting business in North Carolina and shall not require a Certificate of Authority to Transact Business.
-

20. **SUSTAINABILITY: To support the sustainability efforts of the State of North Carolina we solicit** your cooperation in this effort. Pursuant to Executive Order 156 (1999), it is desirable that all responses meet the following:

- If paper copies are requested, all copies of the bid are printed double sided. All submittals and copies are printed on recycled paper with a minimum post-consumer content of 30%.
- Unless absolutely necessary, all bids and copies should minimize or eliminate use of non-recyclable or non-reusable materials such as plastic report covers, plastic dividers, vinyl sleeves, and GBC binding. Three-ringed binders, glued materials, paper clips, and staples are acceptable.
- Materials should be submitted in a format which allows for easy removal, filing and/or recycling of paper and binder materials. Use of oversized paper is strongly discouraged unless necessary for clarity or legibility.

21. **HISTORICALLY UNDERUTILIZED BUSINESSES (HUB):** The State is committed to retaining Vendors from diverse backgrounds, and it invites and encourages participation in the procurement process by businesses owned by minorities, women, disabled, disabled business enterprises and non-profit work centers for the blind and severely disabled. In particular, the State encourages participation by Vendors certified by the State Office of Historically Underutilized Businesses, as well as the use of HUB- certified vendors as subcontractors on State contracts.

22. **RECIPROCAL PREFERENCE:** G.S. 143-59 establishes a reciprocal preference requirement to discourage other states from favoring their own resident Vendors by applying a percentage increase to the price of any bid from a North Carolina resident Vendor. To the extent another state does so, North Carolina applies the same percentage increase to the bid of a vendor resident in that state. Residency is determined by a Vendor's "Principal Place of Business," defined as that principal place from which the overall trade or business of the Vendor is directed or managed.

23. **INELIGIBLE VENDORS:** As provided in G.S. 147-86.59 and G.S. 147-86.82, the following companies are ineligible to contract with the State of North Carolina or any political subdivision of the State: a) any company identified as engaging in investment activities in Iran, as determined by appearing on the Final Divestment List created by the State Treasurer pursuant to G.S. 147-86.58, and any company identified as engaged in a boycott of Israel as determined by appearing on the List of restricted companies created by the State Treasurer pursuant to G.S. 147-86.81. A contract with the State or any of its political subdivisions by any company identified in a) or b) above shall be void *ab initio*

24. **BACKGROUND CHECKS:** Vendor and its personnel may be required to provide or undergo background checks at Vendor's expense prior to beginning work with the State. The State of North Carolina, as described in [Governor Cooper's Executive Order 158, Furthering Fair Chance Policies in State Government Employment \(August 18, 2020\)](#) is committed to eliminating discrimination against persons who have criminal records. The State will not disqualify a vendor from participating in a contract merely based on the criminal history of the Vendor, including its officers or directors, or any of its employees or other personnel providing Services on a project, unless that criminal history impedes the Vendor's ability to perform the contract, or if State or federal law prohibits contracting with vendors with certain criminal convictions. The Vendor is encouraged to extend these considerations to employees, subcontractors, and suppliers.

As part of Vendor background the details below must be provided to the State:

- a) Any **criminal felony conviction**, or conviction of any crime involving moral turpitude, including, but not limited to fraud, misappropriation or deception, of Vendor, its officers or directors, or any of its employees or other personnel to provide Services on this project, of which Vendor has knowledge or a statement that it is aware of none.
- b) Any **criminal investigation** for any offense involving moral turpitude, including, but not limited to fraud, misappropriation, falsification or deception pending against Vendor of which it has knowledge or a statement it is aware of none;

Any regulatory sanctions levied against Vendor or any of its officers, directors or its professional employees expected to provide Services on this project by any state or federal regulatory agencies within the past three years or a statement that there are none. As used herein, the term "regulatory sanctions" includes the revocation or suspension of any license or

certification, the levying of any monetary penalties or fines, and the issuance of any written warnings;

- d) Any **regulatory investigations** pending against Vendor or any of its officers, directors or its professional employees expected to provide Services on this project by any state or federal regulatory agencies of which Vendor has knowledge or a statement that there are none.
- e) Any **civil litigation**, arbitration, proceeding, or judgments pending against Vendor during the three (3) years preceding submission of its proposal herein or a statement that there are none.

Vendor's responses to these requests shall be considered to be continuing representations, and Vendor's failure to notify the State within thirty (30) days of any criminal litigation, investigation or proceeding involving Vendor or its then current officers, directors or persons providing Services under this contract during its term shall constitute a material breach of contract. The provisions of this paragraph shall also apply to any subcontractor utilized by Vendor to perform Services under this contract.

eBUSINESS

- 25. **VALID TAXPAYER INFORMATION**: All persons or entities desiring to do business with the State must provide correct taxpayer information on North Carolina specified forms. The Substitute 9 and Instructions are here:
https://files.nc.gov/ncosc/documents/NCAS_forms/State_of_North_Carolina_Sub_W-9_01292019.pdf
 - 26. **VENDOR REGISTRATION AND SOLICITATION NOTIFICATION SYSTEM**: The North Carolina electronic Vendor Portal (eVP) allows Vendors to electronically register free with the State to receive electronic notification of current goods and services procurement opportunities on the Interactive Purchasing System, as well as notifications of status changes to those solicitations. Online registration and other purchasing information is available at the following website:
<http://ncadmin.nc.gov/about-doa/divisions/purchase-contract>.
The status of a Vendor's E-Procurement Services account(s) shall be considered a relevant factor in determining whether to approve the award of a contract resulting from this SOLICITATION DOCUMENT. Any Vendor with an E-Procurement Services account that is in arrears by 91 days or more at the time of bid opening may, suspended, or deactivated, at the State's discretion, may be disqualified from further evaluation or consideration.
 - 27. **TABULATIONS**: Bid tabulations can be electronically retrieved at the Interactive Purchasing System (IPS), <https://www.ips.state.nc.us/ips/BidNumberSearch.aspx>. Click on the IPS BIDS icon, click on Search for Bid, enter the bid number, and then search. Tabulations will normally be available at this web site not later than one working day after the bid opening. Lengthy or complex tabulations may be summarized, with other details not made available on IPS, and requests for additional details or information concerning such tabulations cannot be honored.
 - 28. **NC BIDS**: NC BIDS is an electronic bidding application that allows an agency to receive vendor responses electronically for specified solicitations, saving time and money by eliminating the need to print and ship paper proposal packages. Each individual solicitation document will indicate whether responses must be submitted electronically through NC BIDS or whether paper responses are required. One of the following instructions will also be included in the **Special Instructions** field: a) Electronic responses ONLY will be accepted, or b) Mailed responses ONLY will be accepted. Submissions that do not comply with the stated submission method will be deemed non-responsive. For more information and online training on NCBids, visit
<https://ncadmin.nc.gov/about-doa/divisions/purchase-and-contract/nc-bids/nc-bids-vendors>
-

29. **CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION:** To the extent permitted by applicable statutes and rules, the State will maintain as confidential trade secrets in its bid that the Vendor does not wish disclosed. As a condition to confidential treatment, each page containing trade secret information shall be identified in boldface at the top and bottom as “CONFIDENTIAL” by the Vendor, with specific trade secret information enclosed in boxes, marked in a distinctive color or by similar indication. Cost information shall not be deemed confidential under any circumstances. Regardless of what a Vendor may label as a trade secret, the determination whether it is or is not entitled to protection will be determined in accordance with G.S. 132-1.2. Any material labeled as confidential constitutes a representation by the Vendor that it has made a reasonable effort in good faith to determine that such material is, in fact, a trade secret under G.S. 132-1.2. Vendors are urged and cautioned to limit the marking of information as a trade secret or as confidential so far as is possible. If a legal action is brought to require the disclosure of any material so marked as confidential, the State will notify Vendor of such action and allow Vendor to defend the confidential status of its information.
30. **COMMUNICATIONS BY VENDORS:** In submitting its bid, the Vendor agrees not to discuss or otherwise reveal the contents of its bid to any source, government or private, outside of the using or issuing agency until after the award of the Contract or cancellation of this solicitation document. All Vendors are forbidden from having any communications with the using or issuing agency, or any other representative of the State concerning the solicitation, during the evaluation of the bids (i.e., after the public opening of the bids and before the award of the Contract), unless the State directly contacts the Vendor(s) for purposes of seeking clarification or another reason permitted by the solicitation. A Vendor shall not: (a) transmit to the issuing and/or using agency any information commenting on the ability or qualifications of any other Vendor to provide the advertised good, equipment, commodity; (b) identify defects, errors and/or omissions in any other Vendor’s bid and/or prices at any time during the procurement process; and/or (c) engage in or attempt any other communication or conduct that could influence the evaluation or award of a Contract related to this solicitation document. Failure to comply with this requirement shall constitute sufficient justification to disqualify a Vendor from a Contract award. Only those communications with the using agency or issuing agency authorized by this solicitation document are permitted.
31. **INFORMAL COMMENTS:** The State shall not be bound by informal explanations, instructions or information given at any time by anyone on behalf of the State during the competitive process or after award. The State is bound only by information provided in writing in this solicitation document and in formal Addenda issued through IPS.
32. **DEBRIEFING POLICY (DHHS):** The Department of Health and Human Services encourages vendors to obtain feedback through a post-award debriefing. Debriefings are important for several reasons, but primarily because they help vendors improve their competitive performance for future procurements. A post-award debriefing is a meeting after contract award with OPCG personnel requested by an offeror who was eliminated from the competition or otherwise unsuccessful in contract award. Successful offerors may also request post-award debriefings. *For more information, read the Vendor Post-Award Debriefing Policy located on the ARPA Portal.*
33. **PROTEST PROCEDURES (Statewide):** When a Vendor wishes to protest the award of The Contract awarded by the Division of Purchase and Contract, or awarded by an agency in an awarded amount of at least \$25,000, a Vendor shall submit a written request addressed to the State Purchasing Officer at: Division of Purchase and Contract, 1305 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-1305. A protest request related to an award amount of less than \$25,000 shall be sent to the purchasing officer of the agency that issued the award. The protest request must be received in the proper office within thirty (30) consecutive calendar days from the date of the Contract award. Protest letters **shall** contain specific grounds and reasons for the protest, how the protesting party was harmed by the award made and any documentation providing support for the protesting party’s claims. **Note:** Contract award notices are sent only to the Vendor actually awarded the Contract, and not to every person or firm responding to a solicitation. Bid status and Award notices are posted on the Internet at <https://www.ips.state.nc.us/ips/>.
-

All protests will be handled pursuant to the North Carolina Administrative Code, 01 NCAC 05B .1519.

34. **PROTEST POLICY (DHHS):** Excepted where excluded or as otherwise provided herein, it is the policy of the Office of Procurement, Contracts and Grants (OPCG) to provide Interested Vendors with an opportunity to administratively resolve protests related to contract awards. All protests that are Timely Filed and contain sufficient information will be accorded consideration, although not every protest submitted to DHHS will necessarily be afforded a protest meeting. Along with other limitations on protests referenced herein, protests relating to cancellation of invitations for bids (IFB) or requests for proposals (RFP) and protests relating to the rejection of all bids or proposals are not permitted. *For more information, read the Vendor Protest Policy located on the ARPA Portal.*
 35. **ORDER OF PRECEDENCE:** In cases of conflict between specific provisions in this solicitation or those in any resulting contract documents, the order of precedence shall be (high to low) (1) any special terms and conditions specific to this solicitation document, including any negotiated terms; (2) requirements and specifications and administration; (3) North Carolina General Contract Terms and Conditions in [NORTH CAROLINA GENERAL CONTRACT TERMS AND CONDITIONS](#); (4) Instructions in INSTRUCTIONS TO VENDORS; (5) PRICING, and (6) Vendor's Bid.
 36. **ADDENDA:** Critical updated information may be included in Addenda to the solicitation document. It is important that all Vendors bidding on the solicitation document periodically check the State's IPS website for any Addenda that may be issued prior to the bid opening date. All Vendors shall be deemed to have read and understood all information in the solicitation document and all Addenda thereto. Vendors are also responsible for obtaining and complying with all Addenda and other changes that may be issued concerning the solicitation document.
 37. **ORAL EXPLANATIONS NON-BINDING:** Oral explanations or instructions will not be binding. Any information given a prospective offeror concerning a solicitation will be furnished promptly to all other prospective offerors as an Amendment to the solicitation, if that information is necessary for submitting offers or if the lack of it would be prejudicial to other prospective offerors. See clause entitled "Duty to Inquire." The State will not identify You in its answer to Your question.
 38. **MAXIMUM COMPETITION:** The State seeks to permit maximum practicable competition. Offerors are urged to advise the State, as soon as possible, regarding any aspect of this procurement, including any aspect of the Solicitation that unnecessarily or inappropriately limits full and open competition. If the State determines that any changes will be made resulting from the questions asked, then such decisions will be communicated in the form of an addendum.
 39. **PROCESS TO AMEND TERMS AND CONDITIONS:** The State may elect to negotiate and amend specific provisions that have been addressed during the question and answer period. Other than through this process, the State rejects and will not be required to evaluate or consider any additional or modified terms and conditions submitted with Vendor's bid or proposal. This applies to any language appearing in or attached to the document as part of the Vendor's bid or proposal that purports to vary any terms and conditions or Vendors' instructions herein or to render the bid non-binding or subject to further negotiation.
 40. **FIRM OFFER:** Vendor's bid shall constitute a firm offer. By execution and delivery of a bid in response to a solicitation document, the Vendor agrees that any additional or modified terms and conditions, whether submitted purposefully or inadvertently, shall have no force or effect, and will be disregarded. Any bid that contains language that indicates the bid is non-binding or subject to further negotiation before a contractual document may be signed shall be rejected.
-