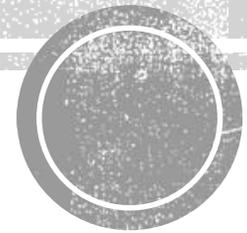


SPECIFICATION WRITING 101



PURPOSE OF SPECIFICATIONS

- Primary method of **communicating** agency **requirements** to suppliers.
- Purchase description of **physical** or **functional characteristics**
- Requirements for **inspection, testing, delivery;**
- Provides the minimum requirements without being too **restrictive**.



WHY ARE SPECIFICATIONS IMPORTANT?

- Let's suppliers know **what you need** (and don't need) while providing a **fair, competitive environment**.
- Allows for improved procurement practices through strategic sourcing.





EXAMPLE: HOOK

Imagine that you have been asked to purchase a hook.

What kind of hook came to mind?

Was it a.....





EXAMPLE: FISH HOOK

You've been asked to procure a fish hook.

Easy right?

Did you consider....



TYPES OF SPECIFICATIONS

- The most common types of specifications used in public procurement are:
 - Design-Based
 - Performance-Based
 - Combination or Mixed
 - Brand Name or Approved Equal
 - Qualified Products List



DESIGN-BASED SPECIFICATIONS

- Focuses on how the supplier must perform a service.
- How the product is made rather than what the product or service does.
- States the physical requirements and characteristics of an item.
- Uses standard measurements like length, weight, size.
- Includes characteristics of what the product is made from.



PERFORMANCE-BASED SPECIFICATIONS

- Focus on **outcomes or results** rather than the process by which the products and services are produced.
- Allow the Suppliers to bring their own **expertise, creativity, and resources** to satisfy the agency requirement.



COMBINATION OR MIXED SPECIFICATIONS

- A combination of two or more types of specifications.
- The most common type of specification used in RFP solicitations.
- For many requirements, the design-performance combination may be the best approach with design requirements kept to a minimum while the performance characteristics are very detailed.



BRAND NAME OR APPROVED EQUAL SPECIFICATIONS

- Identify by name, model number or other designations, a **specific** product manufactured by a specific corporation.
- Must provide principal, physical, functional or other characteristics that are essential to the minimum business needs while providing open and competitive solicitation process.
- Should be accompanied by wording such as “**or equal**” or “**similar in design, construction, and performance**” to indicate to potential suppliers that any item equal in quality to the identified brand names will be acceptable for competition.



QUALIFIED PRODUCTS LIST (QPL)

Approved products are identified by:

- brand name
- model number
- catalogue number and
- other designations that precisely identify a particular product.



POP QUIZ

What kind of specification is this?

- Gel, Retractable, refillable pen, 0.5mm, black ink (Pilot N131002 or equal)
 - a. Design Specification
 - b. Qualified Products List
 - c. Brand Name or Approved Equal
 - d. Performance Specification



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER WHEN WRITING SPECIFICATIONS

- Specification writers should ask themselves the following questions:
 - Who is my audience and who is responding?
 - What do I want people to know or do?
 - What should be my tone or approach?
 - How detailed and exact should my information be?
 - What can I assume about my audience's knowledge of the subject?
 - What might their questions be?



A SPECIFICATION SHOULD BE

- Consistent
- Easy to read and understand
- Easy to revise
- Formatted with good direction
- Common among agency departments, divisions, etc.
- Categorized
- Organized with a good numbering system



SEEK OUT SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS

- A good specification writer should seek the advice, assistance and cooperation of all intended users concerning their precise requirements regarding the standard of quality, type, size, etc.
- Seek assistance of individuals who are considered subject matter experts or have specialized technical competence in the field for which you are developing the specifications.



CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD SPECIFICATION

A good specification should do four things....

1. Identify minimum requirements
2. Allow for competition
3. List reproducible test methods used for compliance with specs
4. Provide for equitable award.



KEY WORDS

- “Must” and/or “shall” – used whenever a specification expresses a mandatory requirement.
- “Should” and/or “may” – used to express non-mandatory provisions.
- For example:
 - “The Supplier _____ deliver bags within 10 days of receipt of order.”
 - “Proposer _____ provide at least three (3) references where they have provided same or similar work.”
 - Proposer _____ provide proof of their Certificate of Liability Insurance.”



POP QUIZ

If you require the Proposer to be a licensed architect or engineer in your state, what word should use in your specification?

- Proposer **SHALL** be a licensed architect or engineer
- Proposer **MAY** be a licensed architect or engineer
- Proposer **SHOULD** be a licensed architect or engineer



CHOOSING THE RIGHT WORDS

- Use simple language; choose simple words over complex ones.
- Say what you mean.
- Be clear on what you mean.
- Limit wordiness.

Choosing the Right Words	
Words that Should Not be Used	Preferred Words
consumption	use
circumvented	avoided
nevertheless	but
activate	start
cooperation	help/aid
erroneous	false
initiate	start
compensation	pay
exemplifies	show
expedite	rush
conglomeration	mixture
disseminate	spread
incinerate	burn
prioritize	rank
modification	change
necessitate	require



USE SHORTER PHRASES

Better Choice of Words or Phrases	
Phrase	Preferred Words or Phrases
a great number of times	often
in most cases	usually
experience has shown	experience shows
a small number of	few
it is recommended that	we recommended
with respect to	concerning
make contact with	meet
at a later point in time	later
in consideration of the fact that	because
at your earliest convenience	soon
at regular intervals	regularly
in the normal course of	normally



THINK ABOUT

Which is easiest to read and understand:

1. Empty trash cans.
2. All 10 gallon, 30” high trash receptacles shall be emptied into the buildings 4 cubic yard metal container at least 5 times a week at approximately 10AM sharp. Replace all liners with quality, extra thick, black, low density polyethylene, 24”Wx30”L, 1mil gauge plastic liners. Proposer shall furnish all labor, equipment (including liners) and supplies necessary to perform services.
3. Empty trash cans into the building’s refuse bin 5 times a week. Replace receptacle liner when the existing bag is leaking, torn, or unsanitary. Contractor shall furnish all labor, equipment (including but is not limited to: cleaner, disinfectant, bags) and supplies necessary to perform services.



EXERCISE 1 – WRITE A SPECIFICATION FOR A PEN



You have been tasked with starting a solicitation to purchase a pen. The requesting department is wanting a pen that is a Zebra Z-Grip Flight #21910 or equal. They want a pen with the following characteristics:

- Must write in black ink;
- Must be 1.2mm pen point size;
- Must have a grip;
- Can be retractable or have a cap;
- Pen must write without skipping or smearing.

Take a moment to write out your specification.



EXERCISE 2 – WRITE A PERFORMANCE SPECIFICATION

You have been tasked with starting a solicitation to purchase a pen. The requesting department is wanting with the following characteristics:

- Write without skipping or smearing;
- Ink must not bleed or penetrate through paper;
- Pen must (at a minimum) have a minimum writing distance of 400 meters.

Take a moment to write out a your specification.



SPECIFICATIONS & THE PROCUREMENT PROCESS

Impact of Specifications on the RFP Process		
Effect on:	Poorly Written	Well Written
Number of Offerors	Overly broad or restrictive specifications <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deter potential offerors • Increase costs • Decrease chance of desired results 	Complete, clear, concise specifications attract many qualified offerors
Evaluation Process/ Protests	Easily misinterpreted open to challenge and protest by unsuccessful bidders	Sharp, specific criteria Easier to evaluate Minimizes possibility of protests
Bidder Risk	Unreasonable requirements = higher risk and higher costs	Reasonable requirements = Lower assumption of risk by bidder
Type of Contract	Uncertain amount of effort leads to cost reimbursement contract	Well defined effort leads to a firm-fixed-price contract



THANK YOU!

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