

**STATE OF WASHINGTON
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE
WASHINGTON STATE LIBRARY
REPOSTING OF
RFP 21-01 STATEWIDE DATABASE LICENSING
Amendment 1 Questions and Answers - No. 1 of 2**

The following are questions and answers from the first release of this RFP. From the Conference it was clear that more time was needed in preparing proposals and processing responses. This is the reason for the reposting. Amendment No. 2 will be posted and February 4, 2021 will release all questions and answers.

Official Answers to Questions posed at the Jan. 13 Preproposal Conference, held online

Preliminary information:

Some of you may be interested to know that in addition to the information contained within the RFP itself, prior to writing the RFP, and to provide guidance for that process, we conducted a needs assessment survey of library staff across the state. That survey data was analyzed and a series of reports published with key results. Those reports are available on our web site via this shortcut link: <https://sos.wa.gov/q/results>. Not only are the results from our most recent needs assessment published there, but you will also find the data from two previous needs assessments, conducted in 2010 and 2015. I would encourage everyone to take a look at that information, which informed the process of crafting the current RFP.

Q: Under “Minimum Qualifications” in the RFP, it states: “Contractor must be registered to do business with the state and have a current Unified Business Identifier (UBI) number.” Is it necessary to have a current UBI prior to submitting a proposal in response to this RFP?

A: No; proposals may be submitted prior to obtaining a UBI. However, should a proposer be designated as an “Apparent Successful Contractor”, that proposer would need to obtain said registration and UBI number, prior to executing a contract with the State of Washington.

Q: Regarding the RFP Section 3.1 Letter of Submittal, #2, as a privately held company and corporate policy, we do not provide personal information on our owner and small board; i.e. address, telephone number. We can provide a roster of these persons and what state, country they reside. Any address or phone number provided would be that of our headquarters office. Will this meet the requirement?

A: A firm proposing under this RFP needs to provide enough information such that OSOS can understand the nature of the ownership. Insufficient information could be justification for rejecting a proposal. OSOS will consider such situations on a case-by-case basis.

Q: Regarding Section 3.3.2 K-12 Resources: Is the 500 word limit just for the general description or does the word limit include the general description along with the enumerated points a. - i.?

A: No, the 500 word limit is intended only for the general descriptions of any databases that are being proposed in response to this RFP. The responses to the numbered or lettered items would be

considered outside or in addition to the 500 word limit. If multiple databases are being provided, the description of each should be 500 words or less, but this limit does not apply to multiple database descriptions combined. This answer applies to Section 3.3.1 Periodicals Database(s) as well.

Q. Regarding Section 3.4.5 Authority Control: I have more than one interpretation of what is being asked for in this section. Can you provide further clarification?

A. That section of the RFP reads as follows:

3.4.5 Authority Control

- a. Describe the authority control for names and subjects in the database product(s). Indicate the source of authority.
- b. For each proposed database product, list and/or describe any thesauri or subject heading lists that are used.

Those questions are written from the perspective of library science and of cataloging as it's typically practiced by libraries. Here is the first sentence of a technical definition: "Authority control (or access point control) refers to the normalization of controlled access points (headings) and the provision of alternative and related access points." From [Librarianship Studies and Information Technology](#): "Authority Control." See also ["Authority control" from Wikipedia](#).

Libraries typically rely on established forms of names of individuals, places, corporations, etc., which are often combined in an authority file, such as those maintained by [OCLC and the Library of Congress](#).

Subject headings are generally based on an established list of such headings, such as the *Library of Congress Subject Headings* (LCSH) or other specialized subject thesauri, such as [MeSH \(Medical Subject Headings\)](#). Many disciplines have established their own subject thesauri, also referred to as "controlled vocabularies."

The purpose of this question is to request information about any system(s) for organizing names and subjects in the proposer's database(s). Proposers should provide a brief description of how the names and subjects used in their database(s) are organized and/or controlled. Those which refer to established systems of authority and/or thesauri will generally receive a higher score than those which use no particular system, or have devised their own. However, this particular question will not have an especially high value in relation to others, and a low score in this one area is unlikely to have a significant overall effect on a proposal's score.

Q: Will a company lose scoring points if they do not provide pricing for the entire state?

A: Probably yes, but if they provide pricing for one library category statewide, such as for all K-12 schools or libraries, that would be better than something more limited. But yes, top scoring would generally only be given to proposals that provide pricing for all types of libraries in the state as described in "EXHIBIT E –Library Data – Libraries in Washington State." If, however, a proposer has contractual obligations, or licensing restrictions from its content providers, that limit its ability to provide its product(s) to all types of libraries, that information should be explained, and could perhaps mitigate lower scoring to at least some degree.

Q: Will a company lose scoring points if they do not provide content in all categories?

A: That depends on how the question is interpreted. Any vendor may apply in either the aggregated periodical category or separately in the K-12 category. You would not lose any points if you are only applying in one or the other of those two categories. Those two categories will be scored separately. That is, a proposal in the aggregated periodical category will be scored as a proposal. And a proposal in the K-12 category will be scored separately as a K-12 proposal. You do not have to apply in both categories and you would not lose any points if you do not apply in both categories.

However, if you are proposing in the K-12 category, and your product ONLY provides science information, for example, and does not cover other subject categories such as history, social studies, literature, etc., that proposal will not be scored as high as one for a product that covers a wider range of topics.

Q. Section 3.3.2 Requires a count of Lexile levels for which we define per article. Do you intend for vendors to provide these counts, which will be in multimillions?

A. Yes, but if you have provided a total item count for the database, the Lexile or reading level totals could be provided as percentages of the item count. Or you could round off the item count totals to the nearest fraction of a million, such as 3.25 million, etc.

One issue we were attempting to address in that particular section, was the fact that some databases have very little content for the lower reading proficiency levels. As an example, in one particular database, when you limit your search by a particular lower Lexile level, 90% of what comes back as hits are just pictures with captions. That wouldn't be considered valid content, in terms of counts for that reading level. We want to see substantial counts of actual articles or written content for all reading proficiency levels.

Q. Will a company lose scoring points if they only submit content for middle school and high school, within the K-12 category?

A. Yes, definitely. Because we are really trying to obtain content for those lower grade levels. Which is admittedly more difficult to find. If your proposal's content was especially compelling and we had the budget to support it, we could theoretically execute a contract for that content as well as a separate contract with another company for the lower Lexile content, but ideally we would prefer to see all of the content available from a single vendor, as it simplifies the procurement process, and is generally more affordable. However, if there is NO proposal that provides suitable content for all K-12 levels for an affordable price, we may have no choice other than to accept a less-than-ideal proposal.

Q. Can you share the budget for this RFP?

A. I can't share the budget per se because it's not really set. What I can say is that we've had a contract with a particular vendor for a number of years and the amount we are currently paying is a matter of public record. Ever since 2005, the total cost of the contract has been half a million dollars annually, until the most recent iteration, starting in 2016, when the cost went up to \$525K and change. That was the first cost increase in over 10 years.

However, it is very important to point out that the current contract has THREE major components: in addition to aggregated periodicals and K-12 resources, there was a major newspaper component. Recently, we negotiated a separate contract for newspapers, including a comprehensive collection of Washington papers, with another vendor, and for that reason, a newspaper package is not a major

component of the current RFP, although as stated in the RFP, we would be happy to include a few newspapers of national significance, such as the *New York Times*, etc.

But the point being, that since we aren't including newspapers as a separately biddable component of this RFP, we would certainly like to see the total cost reflect that reality. And anyone bidding on just one component, such as the K-12 resources, should understand that a cost which exceeds one-third to one-half of what we've been paying, is unlikely to be affordable.

It is also worth mentioning that the State Library traditionally only covers one-half the total contract cost with our federal LSTA dollars, and that the other half of the cost is divided between the participating libraries. Those libraries have made it very clear in their responses to our needs assessment survey that they will not look favorably on increased costs.

So, while a vendor's cost proposal will only receive up to 40% of the total proposal score, proposals that are too costly are unlikely to result in a contract. Ultimately, however, a major purpose of the RFP procurement process is to test the waters, and to find out what the marketplace has to offer, and for what cost.

Q. If it's public record can you include the link?

A. There is not a link anywhere that provides information on current SDL contract costs, that I am aware of. By public record I meant that it's information that could be obtained via a public records request under the laws of the state. But, I don't think we have that cost posted anywhere online.

Q. Were the resources selected in the previous solicitation process proposed as a bundle, or did the Customer select individual resources that are now provided through the program?

A. They were proposed as a bundle and it was an all or nothing deal. Libraries did not have to offer every product that was offered in the bundle, but they paid the same regardless of whether or not they offered all of the products. For example, the product that was specifically aimed at the lower grades might not have been offered by a graduate level scholarly institution of higher education, but it did not affect or reduce their cost.

However, if you go and look at the needs assessment results mentioned earlier, you will clearly see that there is a strong majority of the libraries that would like to see more choices available to them, and that is reflected in the language in the RFP. We understand it may be difficult to do, but that language regarding choices was written into the RFP because of what our libraries throughout the state are telling us.

Q. Will the Customer consolidate billing under any an award in any outcome of this solicitation?

A. That question is addressed in the RFP itself, "Section 3.5.2. Billing Procedures as Part of the Proposal." I would suggest that you read that section very carefully, but basically what it says is that up until now, there has not been centralized billing through the State Library. It is preferred that the vendor be prepared to bill libraries individually. With the exception of the K-12 libraries which traditionally have been invoiced through the nine educational service districts throughout the state, so that it is not necessary to bill every school or school district individually. In fact, there have been only nine invoices required for handling all participating K-12 schools. The RFP states that it is anticipated that

approximately 135-145 individual invoices will need to be distributed by the vendor to participating libraries, based on those that are participating currently.

If this approach is not workable for your company, you need to state that fact very clearly in your proposal. Quoting directly from the RFP, it is assumed that any request for centralized billing will be accompanied by a significant price break. Note that in the Cost Proposal Form, Exhibit F, itemization of costs for individual billing, if any, is required.

Q. How many of the ~60% schools who now participate in the State program did so under individual agreements with vendors?

A. I don't know the answer, to be honest. As previously mentioned, the way we have managed the subscriptions for the K-12 schools, public and private, has been that they signed up through their regional educational service district, their ESD, and the ESD handled invoices with the individual schools and districts and managed their account set ups with the vendor. I have no information about exactly how the ESDs did that in terms of whether they had formal agreements with the schools that would be considered contracts. I do know that some ESDs bundled their SDL offerings with other services they provide such as streaming video packages and the like, although schools were also supposed to have the option of obtaining SDL resources separately, if desired.

The way WSL has handled this is that we have a contract with the vendor that includes access for all non-profit libraries statewide, as described in Exhibit E. We have required participating libraries (and the 9 ESDs) to submit a signed intent to participate form, which states that they agree to pay their share and that they agree to abide by the terms of the licensing agreement from that particular vendor. But it is not executed in quite the same way as a formal contract.

Q. How much notice will be provided for [oral] presentations that may be scheduled?

A. As much as we can. If you look at the overall schedule you will see that there is a listed set of dates for when we will be scoring proposals and it will be during that scoring process that we would decide if we need an oral presentation. I will say, just to be honest, we would prefer not to schedule any oral presentations, because it's more work and it's complicated to find a time that everyone is available both on the scoring task force and from the vendors themselves. The process allows for oral presentations if needed, but we would prefer to avoid them unless we really do feel it's essential.

Q. We are required to provide "current" titles and would like to confirm that this should not include any embargoed titles, per the solicitation definition of the term current.

A. If you look carefully at Exhibit G, the Periodical Title Count Template spreadsheet, where you fill in the title count information, there is a place there where it specifically asks how many embargoed titles you have that are otherwise current. So there is a place for counting those titles.

The definition of "current" in the RFP is as follows:

- b. The term "current" is defined as any title for which there is no close date, and for which the database carries *the most recent issue permitted by the publisher* [emphasis added here]. A title for which full text coverage exists in the past, but for which current full text coverage is not provided, may not be included in counts of current full text titles.

From this definition, a title embargoed by publisher requirement, which is otherwise “full text” according to the definition of that term, may be counted as “current full text”.

Q. Are Lexile levels a mandate? For example, if a database is written by experts for K-3, but it does not display Lexile levels will it be considered?

A. Lexiles are not mandated. I think if you read the RFP carefully, it says we are looking for content that has been designated for a particular age level through some form of a standard, and it says “e.g. Lexiles,” that is “for example, Lexiles.” Keep in mind that “e.g.” and “i.e.” are not the same thing; in this case “e.g.” just means that Lexiles are one example of what we are talking about. If your product uses a different method of measuring or determining content reading level, please provide a description and/or explanation of that methodology.

The RFP says: “Describe any features for searching or limiting by reading level.” So, if the product includes content from multiple reading levels, it can be useful to limit searches to them.

The RFP also says: “Describe the method or criteria by which content is assigned to reading levels, e.g. Lexiles.” If you are using a system other than Lexiles—and we are aware that there are several, although I’m not familiar with all of them—then describe the system that you are using. If your system is simply that you have experts in K-3 writing the content, then say so, and provide evidence of the writers’ expertise.

Q. We are required to provide extensive title details in Exhibit G and the RFP regularly cites the same information is requested for the narrative. Can we simply refer to the form?

A. Section 3.3.1 Periodicals Database(s), under “A. Database Descriptions:” requests a brief, 500 words or less, description of each database product proposed. As part of that description, letter “b.” requests “a brief statement of the total number of titles as well as the number of full text titles in the proposed database package. Include counts for the current year as of the time of your response.” So no, you should not refer to the Exhibit G Periodical Title Count Template Form for this brief description of the database, but should provide the counts as described.

However, when responding to Section “C. Database Title Counts:,” which includes a series of items and sub-items, numbered a.-i., the instructions specifically refer to Exhibit G as the place to record the responses to these count requirements. In the “Exhibit-G--Periodical-Title-Count-Template-Form.xlsx,” which is an Excel spreadsheet, the numbering from Section C. Database Title Counts, is explicitly outlined in Column A, showing which data entry points in the spreadsheet specifically refer to which numbered items in the written RFP, with a direct one-to-one correspondence. So for Section C. Database Title Counts, there is no need to provide a written response to the individual title count questions other than in Exhibit G, the “Periodical Title-Count Template Form.”

Q. Billing question: does the State Library pay half the cost directly to the vendor or does the subsidy go to the library to pay the vendor with their portion?

A. The State Library pays the subsidy directly to the vendor. We receive an invoice from the vendor for our share, for the 50%, or whatever that subsidy is, and we pay it directly. The precise amount of the subsidy is supplied by the State Library to the vendor, along with the invoice amounts for all of the participating libraries.

Q. May we add attachments to the pricing form to present pricing models that don't align with the form?

A. Yes, if the form is not comprehensive or detailed enough to address your needs, or doesn't accommodate the pricing model you wish to present, then yes, you need to present the information in another format. I will say that a proposal which gives us a price for the state, but refuses to break it down by library type will be scored lower. We've had that problem in the past, when for one reason or another the total cost hasn't been broken down.

Q: [The] K-12 [section of the RFP] asks for the title info again.

A: Not in quite the same detail. We would like to know in general the number of titles included, but we are not as interested in title counts from a formal technical perspective as we are with the academic journals that we expect to be an aggregated periodical collection.

In Section 3.3.2 K-12 Resources, sub-item f. states: "Describe the sources from which the database content is drawn, including counts (e.g., periodical titles, book titles, counts for media format materials, etc.)." What this means is, if your K-12 database draws content from books, tell us how many are used. If it draws materials from periodicals, give us a title count for them. If the content drawn from these sources is selective, not cover-to-cover, say so, and explain the selection criteria. If the database includes media content (video, sound files, illustrations, pictures, web-site links, etc.) give us at least approximate counts for each media type, and describe the source of the material. If some or all of the content is original, explain who the authors are, and describe their credentials.

Q. Any chance for an extension? Even 1 week. This is a highly complicated RFP.

A. The deadline for submitting proposals in response to this RFP has been extended for two weeks, from February 5, 2021, until February 19, 4:00 p.m. Pacific Time.

In order to accomplish this, we were forced to withdraw the original solicitation entirely, and replace it with a new one, otherwise identical to the original except for this and other related changes to the schedule of procurement activities.

Q. Can we be considered for both areas? K-12 and libraries?

A: Yes, you can be considered for both areas, if you submit a proposal for each. However, the distinction in the RFP is between content types, not library types. That is, one proposal would be for aggregated periodical products, and the other for K-12 resources. Both proposals should ideally be priced for potential statewide access. At the very least, public libraries need access to both proposal types. And some academic libraries, especially those with teacher training programs, may need access to the K-12 resources as well. As mentioned previously, the two proposals will be scored separately.

Where responses overlap, such as in Section 3.4 Technical and Management Proposal, there is no need to provide identical information twice; one proposal can refer to the other. If the response to a question is identical for both proposals, such as hours of technical support or hours of customer service, then you only need to answer it once. However, if there are products proposed that run on separate platforms, you must answer all technical questions for both platforms, and state that the answer is identical, regardless of whether the products are both for the same proposal or for different ones.

Q. The cost table is for annual pricing. Do you want years 2-5 pricing stated as well?

A. On the Title Page of the RFP it states:

EXPECTED TIME PERIOD FOR CONTRACT: 2 Years plus 3 optional 1-year extensions

And, in Section 1.4 Period of Performance, it states:

1.4.1 The period of performance of any contract resulting from this RFP is scheduled to begin on or about July 1, 2021 and to end on June 30, 2023. OSOS reserves the right to extend the period of performance for up to three (3) additional one-year terms. Any extension will be subject to mutual agreement between OSOS and the Contractor. The total contract term may not exceed five (5) years.

As the questioner pointed out, Exhibit F: Cost Proposal Form requires that the proposer provide

a. Annual cost to provide this Database Package to the entire state:

The simplest way to respond to this requirement, is to total the cost of the first two years together, and divide by 2, to provide an annual cost. However, if the proposing vendor wishes to provide one price for the first year, and a different price for the second year, it is certainly possible to provide two versions of Exhibit F, one clearly marked for each year. For purposes of scoring, those two prices would be combined, for comparison with other proposals.

In the past, the assumption has always been that if OSOS offered a third year extension and the vendor wished to increase the price at that point, they would say so and it would be negotiated at that time. OSOS would either accept the proposed cost increase or if not, the contract would end, and OSOS would presumably issue another RFP at that point. The optional extensions are generally proffered early in the calendar year, to provide sufficient time for a new procurement process, should that prove necessary.

If a proposing company can reliably predict pricing for the entire five years, they are certainly welcome to provide that information up front, using multiple copies of Exhibit F, and an appropriate method of taking that information into consideration during scoring will be implemented. It is perhaps worth mentioning that the current vendor has not raised prices between contracts.

Q. How do we submit additional questions in the coming weeks?

A: Under the revised schedule, February 2, 2021 is the last day to submit questions. Send them to the RFP coordinator via email, please. As the RFP Coordinator, I will acknowledge having received them. I will send a response that says this is to acknowledge receiving your question. If you don't get that, you might want to try calling me on the phone or contact me in some other way. All questions submitted subsequent to the Preproposal Conference will have official responses published by February 4.

Q. Is a trial site required?

A. Access to any proposed database products by and for the scoring team would be extremely helpful, although nothing about this is stated in the RFP, an oversight. Statewide access or a statewide trial site during the scoring process is not required.

However, the RFP does specify that for any firm awarded a contract, it is expected that access will be provided as soon as the contract is executed without any extra charge, so that implementation can

begin, with the goal of having all libraries online by July 1, rather than waiting to begin the implementation process on July 1. The RFP states that any Apparent Successful Contractor should be prepared to start providing access as early as May 1, depending on the timing of contract negotiations and date of contract execution.