

AMENDMENT OF SOLICITATION/MODIFICATION OF CONTRACT

1. CONTRACT ID CODE _____ PAGE OF PAGES _____

2. AMENDMENT/MODIFICATION NO.	3. EFFECTIVE DATE	4. REQUISITION/PURCHASE REQ. NO.	5. PROJECT NO. <i>(If applicable)</i>
6. ISSUED BY CODE _____	7. ADMINISTERED BY <i>(If other than Item 6)</i> CODE _____		

8. NAME AND ADDRESS OF CONTRACTOR <i>(No., street, county, State, and ZIP Code)</i> CODE _____ FACILITY CODE _____	(x)	9A. AMENDMENT OF SOLICITATION NO.
		9B. DATED <i>(SEE ITEM II)</i>
		10A. MODIFICATION OF CONTRACT/ORDER NO.
		10B. DATED <i>(See Item 13)</i>

11. THIS ITEM ONLY APPLIES TO AMENDMENTS OF SOLICITATIONS

The above numbered solicitation is amended as set forth in Item 14. The hour and date specified for receipt of Offers is extended, is not extended.

Offers must acknowledge receipt of this amendment prior to the hour and date specified in the solicitation or as amended, by one of the following methods:

- (a) By completing Items 8 and 15, and returning _____ copies of the amendment;
- (b) By acknowledging receipt of this amendment on each copy of the offer submitted; or
- (c) By separate letter or telegram which includes a reference to the solicitation and amendment numbers. FAILURE OF YOUR ACKNOWLEDGMENT TO BE RECEIVED AT THE PLACE DESIGNATED FOR THE RECEIPT OF OFFERS PRIOR TO THE HOUR AND DATE SPECIFIED MAY RESULT IN REJECTION OF YOUR OFFER. If by virtue of this amendment you desire to change an offer already submitted, such change may be made by telegram or letter, provided each telegram or letter makes reference to the solicitation and this amendment, and is received prior to the opening hour and date specified.

12. ACCOUNTING AND APPROPRIATION DATA *(If required)*

13. THIS ITEM APPLIES ONLY TO MODIFICATIONS OF CONTRACTS/ORDERS. IT MODIFIES THE CONTRACT/ORDER NO. AS DESCRIBED IN ITEM 14.

(x)	A. THIS CHANGE ORDER IS ISSUED PURSUANT TO: <i>(Specify authority)</i> THE CHANGES SET FORTH IN ITEM 14 ARE MADE IN THE CONTRACT ORDER NO. IN ITEM 10A.
	B. THE ABOVE NUMBERED CONTRACT/ORDER IS MODIFIED TO REFLECT THE ADMINISTRATIVE CHANGES <i>(such as changes in paying office, appropriation date, etc.)</i> SET FORTH IN ITEM 14, PURSUANT TO THE AUTHORITY OF FAR 43.103(b).
	C. THIS SUPPLEMENTAL AGREEMENT IS ENTERED INTO PURSUANT TO AUTHORITY OF:
	D. OTHER <i>(Specify type of modification and authority)</i>

E. IMPORTANT: Contractor is not, is required to sign this document and return _____ copies to the issuing office.

14. DESCRIPTION OF AMENDMENT/MODIFICATION *(Organized by UCF section headings, including solicitation/contract subject matter where feasible.)*

Except as provided herein, all terms and conditions of the document referenced in item 9A or 10A, as heretofore changed, remains unchanged and in full force and effect.

15A. NAME AND TITLE OF SIGNER <i>(Type or print)</i>	16A. NAME AND TITLE OF CONTRACTING OFFICER <i>(Type or print)</i>		
15B. CONTRACTOR/OFFEROR _____ <i>(Signature of person authorized to sign)</i>	15C. DATE SIGNED	16B. UNITED STATES OF AMERICA _____ <i>(Signature of Contracting Officer)</i>	16C. DATE SIGNED

The purpose of this amendment is to:

A. Provide answers to questions received concerning the solicitation.

B. Provide a revised Statement of Work, Section C, as the original Statement of Work (SOW) was provided in error. The major changes is the deletion of the requirement for convening certain conferences and expert meetings (Task 16 of the original SOW); the EPC Scientific Advisory Group (Tasks 10, 11 and 12 of the original SOW); EPC annual meeting (Task 15 of the original SOW); EPC Partner's Meeting (Task 23 of the original SOW). The amount specified for honoraria for non-Federal keynote speakers at the TRIP conference (Task 14 of the original SOW) has been reduced from \$3,000 to \$2,000 per person. The number of requests for information requests in working with AHRQ's Office of Health Care Information is increased to 12 per year for estimation purposes. For planning purposes, the number of literature searches is increased from 15 to 20 topics per year. **Offerors should review the entire revised SOW for all changes.**

C. Provide a revised Section L - Instructions, Conditions and Notices to Offerors. Offerors should review the revised Section L for all changes.

D. Provide a revised Section M - Evaluation Factors for Award. Offerors should review the revised Section M for all changes.

E. Extend the date for receipt of proposals to Friday, April 26, 2002, at 2:00 p.m., local time.

The number of proposals that need to be submitted has been revised as follows:

Technical Proposals - Original and 13 copies

Past Performance Information - Original and 3 copies

Small Disadvantaged Business Participation Plan - Original and 1 copy

Business Proposal - Original and 3 copies

Small Business Subcontracting Plan - Original and 3 copies (submitted as a separate section within the Business Proposal)

All offerors should read the following questions and answers for any changes to the solicitation that have resulted from the questions received.

Response to Questions:

1. On page 61 it says that CVs are required only for key personnel, but on page 63 it says that they are required for everyone. Please clarify for whom you would like CVs submitted.

Response: *Resumes or CV of the offeror's key personnel (those individuals who will have major management and technical oversight of tasks to be performed under this contract) are to be included in the proposals. If subcontractors and/or consultants are being proposed to fill these key positions, then their resumes/CV should be included as well.*

2. On page 64, the RFP asks for the number of person hours for each task. Do you mean each

of the 30 tasks listed on pages 8-11 of the RFP, (2) our own grouping of those tasks in functional activities (e.g., conference management), (3) each of the specific projects that AHRQ will ask us to undertake (e.g., each of the 15 assessments of nominated topics, each evidence report update assessment), or (4) something else?

Response: *We will accept the offeror's choice of approach(s) to provide this information.*

3. Please confirm that the 125-page limit applies to the technical approach, key personnel, and organizational experience sections only.

Response: *Section L.8 of the solicitation describes the contents of the technical proposal.*

4. Does Task 20 on page 10 require us to track any EPC I reports? If so, how many should we plan for? How many EPC II reports would we plan for?

Response: *There may be 15-20 EPC I reports that will be published after the start of the Coordinating Center contract. These will be tracked for 3 years following publication, the same as the tracking period for EPC II reports. For planning purposes, estimate 10-12 EPC II reports published on an annual basis throughout the life of this contract.*

5. Page 67 -- Section L.11 (a) Direct Labor -- asks for salary and fringe benefits for each employee; and Page 97 -- Attachment 5 (breakdown of proposed estimated cost plus fee) requests % of total direct labor cost. Which way would AHRQ prefer the fringe benefits rate be listed -- for each person or as a percent of total direct labor cost?

Response: *We will accept the breakdown either way the offeror prefers to propose.*

6. The cover letter for the RFP states that this will be a 5-year effort, but the first sentence in RFP Section B.2 indicates that this will be a 3-year contract. Would you please clarify the period of performance?

Response: *There was a typographical error in Section B.2. This is a 5-year contract.*

7. Reference: Section C, SOW, Specific Requirements, Tasks 13 and 14 - What percentage of the overall TRIP conference expenses should be recovered through the registration fee?

Response: *Usual conference expenses such as cost of meeting rooms, meeting materials, coffee/tea breaks, one major luncheon, and related routine conference costs should be covered by the registration fee.*

8. Reference: Section C, SOW, Specific Requirements, Task 16 - When do you anticipate holding the first of these meetings ("other conferences and expert meetings")? For budgetary purposes should we assume the first one will be in the first year of the contract or second?

Response: *This task was included in the original solicitation by error. The task is being deleted by this amendment. Please review the revised Section C attached to this amendment.*

9. Reference: Section C, SOW, Specific Requirements, Task 25 - Per the description of Task 25, the contractor is required to create a database to store and retrieve information/data elements specific to each EPC report including the report's bibliography, search strategies and inclusion/exclusion criteria. Task 25 specifies that the contractor will be receiving EPC report-specific information on a CD-ROM from each EPC at the completion of a report. Will this requirement apply to both the EPC I and EPC II programs? If it applies only to the EPC II program, how will the Coordinating Center contractor obtain the report-specific information for EPC I studies needed to manage the updating process? Will the EPCs be required to provide the data elements identified for this task in a common data format (e.g., ASCII) or will it be the responsibility of the contractor to develop a standard data model for EPC report data and convert EPC data provided on the CD-ROM to that model?

Response: *Task 25 (which is now Task #18 of the revised Statement of Work) applies only to the EPC II program. It will be the responsibility of the Contractor to develop a standard data model for EPC II reports and convert the data provided to that model. The Contractor shall advise AHRQ on the best format for transfer of data from the EPC to the Contractor. AHRQ will provide the EPCs direction on the most cost-effective way to transfer the data to the Contractor. Published EPC I reports are available on AHRQ's webpage as PDF files.*

10. Reference: Section C, SOW, Specific Requirements, Task 25 - Task 25 specifies that the contractor should expect to respond to 50 requests per year for information in the database. Can AHRQ clarify the anticipated nature of these requests?

Response: *AHRQ anticipates that researchers may request information related to EPC evidence reports that are necessary to perform additional analyses, replicate analyses, or update an existing report. AHRQ does not anticipate more than 50 requests per year for information. AHRQ does not require the Contractor to provide technical assistance to requesters. Requesters will be referred back to the EPC for questions regarding the content of the database.*

11. RFP Section L.8 - RFP Section L.8.c, first paragraph, states that "resumes or CVs are only required for key personnel" and that offerors may provide brief biographical sketches of other personnel. Section L.8.c, third paragraph, however, indicates that resumes should be submitted for "all proposed project personnel, including consultants, subcontractors, and part-time employees." Please clarify.

Response: *Please refer to Question 1.*

12. Reference: Special Eligibility Notice (page 1 of RFP) - We understand that EPC II prime contractors, subcontractors and consultants are ineligible to participate as part of an EPC Coordinating Center proposal. Is it permissible to include in a bid for the Coordinating Center an individual from an institution (e.g., a large university) that operates an EPC as long as that individual is not associated with the EPC?

Response: *No, the entire institution is ineligible.*

13. Reference: Notice of Small Business goals (page 1 of RFP) - Please clarify whether the subcontracting goals apply to the total contract dollars available for subcontracting or to the entire contract value.

Response: *The goals specified in the RFP apply to the entire contract dollars. These percentages of the entire contract value are included to give you an idea of the total amount to be set aside for subcontracting opportunities that we would like to see the successful contractor achieve during performance of the contract. Once the offeror has determined how much subcontracting opportunity exists, they will complete the Small Business Subcontracting Plan. The Plan calls for the goals entered to be based on the percentage of total planned subcontracting dollars. Therefore, the actual percentage goals entered on the Small Business Subcontracting Plan may not reflect the same percentage as provided in the RFP since the basis is different.*

14. Reference: Page 2 of the RFP, and Section L.11 - Please clarify the required number of business proposals to be submitted. An original and 10 copies are requested on page 2 of the RFP, but an original and 5 copies are requested in Section L.11.

Response: *We have revised the number of proposals to be submitted as follows:*

Technical Proposals - Original and 13 copies

Past Performance Information - Original and 3 copies

Small Disadvantaged Business Participation Plan - Original and 1 copy

Business Proposal - Original and 3 copies

Small Business Subcontracting Plan - Original and 3 copies (submitted as a separate section within the Business Proposal)

15. Reference: Page 1 of the RFP, and Section B.2 - Please clarify a.) the length of the EPC Coordinating Center contract (Page 1 states: "A cost reimbursement type contract is contemplated for a period of five (5) years." Section B. 2 states: NOTE: "The Government estimates that the total amount for this three year contract (including estimated costs and fees) will be less than \$3.3 million." **AND** it also states "The estimated cost (exclusive of fixed fee) of this five-year contract is \$(TO BE COMPLETED UPON AWARD)." and b.) the contract term, i.e., that this will be a 5-year contract rather than a base period plus options.

Response: *See Question 6. This is a 5-year contract. The \$3.3 million remains the estimated amount for the 5-year period.*

16. Please clarify – In Part I – The Schedule (RFP page 1) it is stated that "The Government estimates that the total amount for this five year contract ...will be less than \$3.3 million." Whereas, in Section B.2 (RFP page 4) the NOTE states that the estimate is for *three* years. Please clarify.

Response: *See Questions 6 and 15.*

17. In Section C, Task 12 – Scientific Advisory Group – for proposal purposes, how many of the up to 15 members are we to assume are non-Federal? Of that number, how many are local to the Washington D.C. area (i.e., will not need airfare or lodging), or is the offeror to make its own

assumption for this proportion? Also, for this and all meetings below – are we correct in assuming that we are to budget the M&IE portion of per diem along with the “travel and lodging costs”?

Response: *This task was included in the original solicitation by error. The task is being deleted by this amendment. Please review the revised Section C.*

18. For Tasks 13/14 – TRIP Meetings – will breakout sessions be required? Are functions envisioned to include AM & PM coffee breaks, and a luncheon, for which registration fees will offset the costs? Are any of the 4 non-Federal speakers assumed to be local, for whom travel and lodging costs will be reduced?

Response: *For planning purposes, assume that one (1) of the four non-Federal speakers will be local with the remaining speakers requiring travel and lodging. See Question #73. Assume five breakout sessions; assume coffee/tea breaks and one major luncheon.*

19. Task 15 – EPC Meetings – Please confirm: should we assume that all 36 EPC participants for whom costs are to be estimated are non-local?

Response: *This task was included in the original solicitation by error. The task is being deleted by this amendment. Please review the revised Section C.*

20. Task 16 – other conferences and meetings – how many non-Federal (and non-local) participants should be assumed, and are we to interpret “honoraria for up to 4 presenters” as to assume for proposal cost purposes precisely 4?

Response: *This task was included in the original solicitation by error. The task is being deleted by this amendment. Please review the revised Section C.*

21. Task 23 – Partners Meetings- How many of the 50 former and current Partners are we to assume are non-Federal non-local people, for budgeting purposes?

Response: *This task was included in the original solicitation by error. The task is being deleted by this amendment. Please review the revised Section C.*

22. Can the Government provide any information on anticipated Full Time Equivalencies (FTE's) that may be required, for proposal purposes? The RFP indicates in Section L.8 on page 64 (6th bullet) that the offeror should list “the percentage of full time core personnel” for the project. However, on page 68, 3rd complete paragraph, it is stated that “The Contractor is not required to have all types of expertise available on a full time basis.” Which staff does the Government envision as full time? Please clarify if possible by providing an estimate for uniform pricing purposes of anticipated FTEs envisioned. One concern is that the overall Government estimate of \$3.3 million might preclude full time core personnel for this project, given the wide variety of support and senior level staff required.

Response: *A sufficient level of effort should be established to ensure major task areas are appropriately staffed by employees/consultants/subcontractors, with appropriate skills/expertise to ensure successful completion of sub-tasks within major task areas, and*

sufficient senior management oversight is available to provide guidance and direction. Major task areas include (a) establishment and operation of the database; (b) literature searches and subsequent evaluation of studies identified; (c) working with professional groups and other AHRQ Partners to assist Partner's efforts to disseminate their products derived from the EPC reports (e.g., clinical guidelines) and track members' use of these products; and (d) tracking and collecting programmatic information required by AHRQ. The major task areas require different levels of skills/expertise and are likely to differ in terms of volume of work to be performed on a weekly/quarterly basis. In addition, offerors should assume that some tasks have "peak" seasons that require intense, if short-lived, levels of effort (e.g., multiple literature searches of topics for possible evidence reports, that must be completed between March-August).

23. Is the focus of the proposed center to be mostly administrative in nature?

Response: *The tasks and expertise required for the EPC Coordinating Center are in the solicitation, Sections C, L, and M.*

24. Please clarify if there are four or five meetings (EPC, Partners, and TRIP) anticipated during contract period. (After Jan 2003).

Response: *There is only the requirement for the TRIP meeting. The other tasks were included in the original solicitation by error. Those tasks are being deleted by this amendment. Please review the revised Section C.*

25. Please clarify how AHRQ derived 50 partners, when there are only 10-12 EPCs. Did AHRQ include technical support time in the proposed budget? Who is considered to be Partners? Is the number of Partners anticipated to grow each year?

Response: *There is not a direct correlation between the number of EPCs and the number of Partners. Partners are those organizations whose nominated topics are selected by AHRQ for an EPC evidence report. AHRQ does not anticipate the number of active Partners to grow each year.*

26. Is the travel RFP budget based on new (higher) federal travel allowance?

Response: *Yes. See Question #73 for travel cost assumptions for the TRIP meeting.*

27. For the annual conference of 300 (TRIP), does the government intend on having all costs (other than travel/hotel for those out of town) encompassed in the registration fee?

Response: *All usual/routine meeting costs (e.g., one luncheon, meeting rooms, background materials, etc.) should be covered by the registration fee. Honoraria, travel and lodging for the plenary speakers should be included in the offeror's proposed budget.*

28. Will the contractor be permitted to make all travel arrangement for all participants?

Response: *This is unknown at this time. This can be discussed more fully with the successful offeror as the need arises.*

29. Will each literature search be directed by well-defined clinical questions and key terms, or will the search be conducted by topic only?

Response: *Searches will be directed by preliminary questions, which may be clinical in nature but also may relate to social sciences questions and/or organization and delivery system questions.*

30. Are these preliminary literature searches aimed to obtain a sense of the type of evidence that is available, or search for Best Evidence? Do they include appraisal of the studies?

Response: *The EPC Coordinating Center solicitation, Section C, outlines the nature and purpose of the literature searches and the required follow-on evaluation of studies identified in the searchers.*

31. Does AHRQ provide clinicians available for consultation or is consult to be provided by the contractor?

Response: *We are not sure which task you are referring to, but the Contractor is normally responsible for providing all resources necessary to complete the required tasks of the contract.*

32. Some airline tickets are non-refundable as well as hotel cancellation policies. What is the accounting treatment of travel costs for no-shows to the meetings?

Response: *These situations will be discussed and handled on a case-by-case basis with the contractor as the need arises.*

33. How far back in time will the database be expected to include prior reports of EPC work?

Response: *EPC reports funded in FY 2001 and subsequent years will be included in the database.*

34. Will AHRQ mandate that data submitted to the contractor by the various EPCs be in the same format?

Response: *Yes.*

35. Who are the present EPCs?

Response: *Blue Cross/Blue Shield Association, Technology Evaluation Center; Duke University; ECRI; Johns Hopkins University; McMaster University; MetaWorks, Inc.; New England Medical Center; Oregon Health and Science University; RAND; Research Triangle Institute; University of Texas, San Antonio; and University of California, San Francisco/Stanford University.*

36. Have the EPCs for EPC II been selected? If so, who are they? If not, who are the applicants that have applied to date?

Response: *Awards of the EPC II have not yet been made. The names of those who have submitted proposals are confidential as it was a competitive solicitation.*

37. Are any of the EPCs from EPC I going to be retained during EPC II. If yes, how many are estimated to be a part of EPC II in addition to the 10-14 new EPC II participants?

Response: *A total of 10-14 EPCs will be awarded under EPC II. It is not yet known who will be awarded contracts.*

38. What are the selection criteria for EPCs?

Response: *This information was delineated in the solicitation for the EPC II (AHRQ-02-0003), which is available for review at AHRQ's webpage at www.ahrq.gov.*

39. Who are the present AHRQ Partners?

Response: *Present AHRQ Partners include American Academy of Family Physicians; American Association for Clinical Chemistry; National Cancer Institute; American Academy of Pediatrics; American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists; Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services; Social Security Administration; American Association of Health Plans; and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.*

40. Are AHRQ Partners eligible to bid on this contract?

Response: *No.*

41. What are the selection criteria for AHRQ Partners?

Response: *Organizations whose nominated topics are accepted by AHRQ for an EPC Evidence Report become AHRQ's Partners.*

42. Presently, how do AHRQ partners, health care community or general public access information developed by the EPCs.

Response: *EPC evidence reports are available from AHRQ's Clearinghouse; AHRQ's website; and through journal publication of EPC manuscripts.*

43. What present tracking mechanism and/or IT software are used to track the EPC's development of projects, requests for, use and impact of those products on clinical care?

Response: *AHRQ has no formal mechanism for tracking. The mechanism will be established by the EPC Coordinating Center.*

44. Describe with examples the type of technical assistance needed by EPCs that have been requested during EPC I.

Response: *Technical assistance provided to the EPCs in EPC I is primarily related to the publication process for evidence reports.*

45. Describe with examples the type of technical assistance needed by AHRQ Partners that has been requested during EPC I.

Response: *Some Partners have received technical assistance from some EPCs related to translating an EPC report into clinical practice guidelines.*

46. How are EPC-developed products presently disseminated to AHRQ Partners?

Response: *See Question 42.*

47. Is there any communication or technical assistance provided by the EPCs directly to the AHRQ partners. If yes, please describe type with examples if possible. Does this communication or assistance occur through AHRQ or directly between EPCs and AHRQs?

Response: *See Question 45.*

48. Please describe present level of coordination among EPCs?

Response: *Coordination among the EPCs is provided by AHRQ in the form of conference calls and an annual meeting.*

49. What are the roles and responsibilities of the EPCs?

Response: *See Question 38.*

50. Are EPCs divided by topic areas, region, something else or operate individually on any topic? What are EPCs expected to provide to AHRQ yearly? Is there a commitment to provide a certain level of work? If so, what and how is the quality and quantity of that work presently measured?

Response: *See Question 38.*

51. What are the roles and responsibilities of the AHRQ partners.

Response: *Partners may be represented on an EPC technical expert panel; may be part of the external group that reviews draft EPC reports; use the reports as a basis for developing their own clinical guidelines, performance measures, reimbursement policy.*

52. What were the costs associated with annual TRIP meetings, EPC meetings, and Partner meetings in the past 2 years?

Response: *The requirement for EPC and Partner meetings was included in the original solicitation by error. Those tasks are deleted by this amendment. Please review the revised Section C. The last TRIP conference occurred in 1999 at an estimated cost of \$200,000.*

53. What is the anticipated start date for this contract?

Response: *We anticipate award sometime in July or August 2002.*

54. Will AHRQ supply the COTS software or would you like the contractor to supply that and include it in the proposal? If the COTS software is provided by the contractor in order to select a software package for pricing what are the existing hardware systems and what are the database specifications required?

Response: *The Contractor shall supply the COTS software and include the cost in their proposal. The Contractor shall use an open system, industry standard software solution adequate for the purpose of the database, which is to compile data elements from EPC Evidence Reports for easy retrieval upon request. AHRQ does not anticipate the database to be overly complex or large. Delivery of the database shall include documentation necessary for continued operation and maintenance of the database. The Contractor is expected to maintain the database on their system during the duration of the contract. AHRQ reserves the right to inspect the database at the Contractor's site with 2 hours notice and to require the Contractor to provide the database as a deliverable within 5 working days notice.*

55. For planning purposes, how many conference calls should we assume will be required for Task 12 and approximately how many minutes will they be?

Response: *This task was included in the original solicitation by error. The task is being deleted by this amendment. Please review the revised Section C.*

56. What topic areas will be the focus for curriculum development? For what audience? Are there examples of prior curriculum developed that we can review? What are the present criteria for evaluation of the curriculum? How is performance presently measured on curriculum that is developed?

Response: *AHRQ will develop curriculum-related tasks for the EPCs during 2002-2003. The task is not the responsibility of the EPC Coordinating Center.*

57. What research methodologies are favored? Why? How are these preferences anticipated to change over the life of the grant?

Response: *The EPCs and the EPC Coordinating Center are contracts, not grants. AHRQ does not favor one research methodology over another.*

58. What affiliation is there currently with academic centers in the current process? If any, why were these centers chosen?

Response: *Some EPCs are academic medical centers. They were designated EPCs following the 1997 original competition to establish the Agency's EPC program.*

59. Describe the roles and competencies (training, educational background, experience, etc.) that each "professional" will play and should have (e.g., director, coordinator, etc.).

Response: *Please refer to the EPC Coordinating Center solicitation, Sections C, L, and M. Revised Sections C, L and M are included in this amendment.*

60. Is there a schema of how your office sees this project fitting into your existing org structure (org chart needed)?

Response: *The EPC Program is organizationally administered in the Agency's Center for Practice and Technology Assessment.*

61. Page 1 states Notice of Intent Due April 12, 2002. Page 90, Attachment 3, Proposal Intent Response Sheet states to return by April 23, 2002. Is this the form to use for notice of intent? Is it due the 12th or the 23rd? Can it be faxed or e-mailed to you?

Response: *Attachment 3, Proposal Intent Response Sheet is the form to use for notice of intent. The due date for return of notices of intent is extended to April 19. They may be faxed, e-mailed, or sent by regular mail.*

62. RFP Section C. Coordinating Center-AHRQ-EPC Program Interface - Contractor is to proceed with tasks only with prior approval of the Project Officer. Please describe in detail formal procedures associated with obtaining prior approval of Project Officer. Is this a task order contract? What is the government's estimate of the number of tasks per year requiring prior approval of the Project Officer? What information, if any, will the Contractor need to submit to the government prior to obtaining the Project Officer's approval? Are the tasks requiring approval the 30 tasks specified under Tasks To Be Performed in the solicitation's Work Statement or are they subtasks of these tasks? What is the maximum number of tasks that the Contractor will be required to perform simultaneously? What is the expected method, or methods of providing support/communicating with AHRQ, its EPCs and Partners, researchers, providers, etc? For costing purposes, what is the anticipated number of interactions/communications per year?

Response: *Oversight responsibilities for the EPC Program and the EPC Coordinating Center will be carried out by a senior staff member in the Agency's Center for Practice and Technology Assessment (CPTA) who will be designated as the AHRQ Project Officer for this contract. The Coordinating Center, in its role of supporting the Agency's administration of the EPC Program, will work closely with the CPTA Project Officer on tasks to be performed under this contract. The Project Officer will be the principal contact with the Contractor. Those tasks are detailed in the solicitation's Statement of Work, Section C. Note, however, that in addition to the established set of core tasks, AHRQ may also assign additional tasks in the event of unanticipated programmatic need (refer to solicitation Section C, paragraph 2). Prior approval of the Project Officer refers to initiation of the core tasks outlined in the solicitation and additional tasks that may arise. The Contractor's comprehensive work plan, required as Task 1, will include anticipated start dates for projects to be performed and approval of the work plan may constitute approval of the start dates included therein, but flexibility for some adjustments in these schedules may also be needed. The primary and most cost effective method of communicating with the Project Officer, EPCs, and Partners will be by e-mail. For costing purposes, assume a quarterly conference call (60 minutes) and weekly e-mail exchange with the Project Officer for Year 1. The quarterly conference calls and e-mail exchange will continue in out years. The level of e-mail exchange may fluctuate and will depend on tasks under development. The Project Officer will initiate the conference calls. In 02 and subsequent years, as the Contractor provides technical assistance to Partners, the level of communication will depend upon the number and types of assistance requested, but assume assistance to 4*

Partners annually for cost estimating purposes.

63. RFP Section C. Tasks To Be Performed - Task 1. Is the start-up meeting with the Project Officer required to be a face-to-face meeting? If yes, can it be held at the Contractor's facility to minimize travel-related costs and enable more Contractor staff to attend? If a face-to-face meeting is required and the meeting needs to be at the government's facility, please provide for proposal costing purposes: meeting location, a time estimate for the meeting (e.g., hours, half-day, full-day), whether an overnight stay may be required, and number/type of Contractor staff required to attend. Can Task 1 meeting with the Project Officer be carried out by a telephone conference call instead of a face-to-face meeting? Could the annual work plan, or annual update of the work plan, developed as a result of meetings with the Project Officer, have a financial impact on the Contractor's costs for performing tasks specified in the Work Statement?

Response: *The start-up meeting may be by conference call. The call will be initiated by the AHRQ Project Officer. There is always the possibility that the work plan and/or its updates could have a financial impact on Contractor's costs. Should that occur we would negotiate a contract modification or find other ways to address this problem.*

64. Task 2. Please provide examples of topics which could be the focus of topic-specific search strategies? Will requests for literature searches and topic-specific search strategies come only from the Project Officer? For proposal costing purposes, can we assume 15 topic-specific search strategies will be developed per year? For planning purposes, what is the maximum number of topic-specific search strategies that may be requested in any four week period? What is the time frame for Project Officer approval of a topic-specific search strategy? Is the time frame for developing and submitting a topic-specific search strategy to the Project Officer four (4) weeks from receipt of request?

Response: *Requests for literature searches will come only from the AHRQ Project Officer. We do not have a slate of topics to be funded in FY 2002 at this time. However, for illustrative purposes only, and taken from current EPC work, examples of topics which could be the focus of the Contractor's literature search are (a) management of Hepatitis C; (b) seasonal allergies, effect on working populations; (c) management of bronchiolitis; and (d) management of coronary heart disease in women. Assume 20 topic-specific search strategies per year. As a rule, the need for preliminary literature searches occurs primarily between March and August of each fiscal year. Contractor may assume that some searches will be underway, while other search strategies are being developed for AHRQ approval, and will need to be initiated even as prior searches are being completed. The AHRQ Project Officer will work with the Contractor to map out reasonable plans to complete this phase of intense work, needed within a discrete time frame to ensure timely award of task orders to the EPCs for the topics to be addressed in any fiscal year. Assume 4-weeks from receipt of a request from the AHRQ Project Officer for developing and completing a search strategy, including the follow-on assessment of the quality of studies identified, with the understanding that multiple searches are likely to be needed within a given 4-week period during the peak period of need indicated above.*

65. Task 3. What is the time frame for Project Officer review of criteria by which Contractor will evaluate the quality and relevance of studies identified in the literature searches? Is the time frame for developing and submitting criteria by which Contractor will evaluate the quality and relevance of studies identified in the literature searches four (4) weeks from receipt of request

for a topic-specific search strategy?

Response: *We assume that the Contractor will develop criteria for evaluating the quality and relevance of studies identified in the literature searches that is applicable for all topics searched. We do not anticipate topic-specific criteria developed prior to each search.*

66. Task 4. For proposal costing purposes, what dollar amount should be allocated for proprietary commercial database searches?

Response: *Offerors should rely on their own experience in doing database searches and propose accordingly to historical costs.*

67. Task 6. Please confirm that Contractor has four (4) weeks from date of receipt of an assigned literature search topic to: i) develop and submit a search strategy; ii) develop and submit criteria to evaluate quality and relevance of search results; iii) perform the literature search; iv) evaluate the quality and relevance of the search results; and v) submit a detailed report to the Project Officer on the results of the topic-specific search and whether there are sufficient relevant and credible studies to support a systematic review and analysis. Is there a specific format for the report and/or a page limitation? For planning and costing purposes, can the government provide offerors with electronic or hardcopy access to one or more representative examples of prior EPC evidence reports and technology assessments?

Response: *There is no specific format or page limitation for the report on results of each literature search. The report is to provide sufficient detail to enable AHRQ to reach a decision regarding funding of that particular topic, based on the Contractor's preliminary search and follow-on evaluation of the studies. Also refer to answers to Questions 64 and 65. Copies of published EPC reports are available on AHRQ's webpage at <http://www.ahrq.gov/clinic/epcix.htm>.*

68. Task 7. In conjunction with this task, does the government plan to provide the Contractor with prior EPC evidence reports and technology assessments? If yes, when? If no, why not?

Response: *See Question 67.*

69. Task 10. What government provided documents, if any, will be provided to the Contractor for use in developing an outline for establishing an EPC Scientific Advisory Group? What is the time frame for completion of the Project Officer's review? Who is eligible to comprise the EPC Scientific Advisory Group and what are the minimum qualifications for becoming a member? Will the Group include member/partners to the EPCs/AHRQ or outsiders? Who will be responsible for determining the objectives and goals for the Goals and Objectives, and Outcomes components of the outline?

Response: *This task was included in the original solicitation by error. The task is being deleted by this amendment. Please review the revised Section C.*

70. Task 11. What government provided documents, if any, will be provided to the Contractor

for use in identifying responsibilities resting with the Advisory Group versus responsibilities of the Coordinating Center in its role as support for the Group?

Response: *This task was included in the original solicitation by error. The task is being deleted by this amendment. Please review the revised Section C.*

71. Task 12. Please confirm that Contractor will not be required to establish and convene meetings of the Group in calendar Year 2002. For proposal costing purposes, please establish an annual dollar amount to be used by offerors for travel and lodging costs related to face-to-face meetings of the Scientific Advisory Group since the requirement as stated is too vague to provide meaningful cost data for use in a competitive evaluation. In the absence of an annual dollar amount, please provide starting points for each of the 15 proposed members and an escalation factor to be used for airfares. Please state whether non refundable airline tickets are acceptable. Please provide details on how dates for face-to-face meetings of the Scientific Advisory Group will be established and what advance notice (e.g., time frame) the Contractor will have for setting up the meeting. Please state whether costs should be included in the budget for coffee and other refreshments at meeting breaks?

Response: *This task was included in the original solicitation by error. The task is being deleted by this amendment. Please review the revised Section C.*

72. Task 13 - Will the government provide the Contractor with information on what types of themes they want to cover and what types of subjects they want to focus on at the "Translating Research into Practice (TRIP)" annual conference? Please provide some detail as to what is to be included in the "projected dollar figure for the registration fee." Please state what travel-related Contractor costs offerors should provide for in their cost proposals related to their attendance at this meeting. How many Contractor staff will be expected to attend the meeting and provide meeting support services?

Response: *AHRQ will work with the Contractor on planning the TRIP annual conference. See Questions 7 and 18. The offeror should propose the number of staff their experience has shown is necessary for a meeting of this size.*

73. Task 14. For proposal costing purposes, please establish a dollar amount to be used by offerors for travel and lodging costs for 4 non-Federal key speakers since the requirement as stated is too vague to provide meaningful cost data for use in a competitive evaluation. In the absence of a dollar amount, please provide starting points for each of the 4 non-Federal key speakers and an escalation factor to be used for airfares. Please state whether non refundable airline tickets are acceptable. Please provide details on how dates for face-to-face meetings of the Scientific Advisory Group will be established and what advance notice (e.g., time frame) the Contractor will have for setting up the meeting. Are the key speakers expected to be experts from different parts of the country? What selection criteria exist for consideration of an individual as a non-Federal key speaker? How are non-Federal key speakers chosen? Please state whether costs should be included in the budget for coffee and other refreshments at meeting breaks.

Response: *For the TRIP meeting, assume one of the non-Federal key speakers will be a local participant and the other three will require travel, per diem and lodging reimbursement.*

For cost estimating purposes, assume \$100 for local travel expenses of the one local participant and assume \$1500 for travel, per diem and lodging for each of the three non-local participants. Please note the honoraria for the 4 non-Federal key speakers is changed to \$2,000 per speaker. The requirement for the Scientific Advisory Group has been deleted. AHRQ will make the speaker selections.

74. Task 15. For proposal costing purposes, please establish a dollar amount to be used by offerors for travel and lodging costs for 36 EPC participants since the requirement as stated is too vague to provide meaningful cost data for use in a competitive evaluation. In the absence of a dollar amount, please provide starting points for each of the 36 EPC participants and an escalation factor to be used for airfares. Please state whether non refundable airline tickets are acceptable. Please state what advance notice (e.g., time frame) the Contractor will have for setting up the meeting. Are these 36 EPC participants expected to be experts from different parts of the country? How are these individuals chosen? How many Contractor staff will be expected to attend the meeting and provide meeting support services? Please state whether costs should be included in the budget for coffee and other refreshments at meeting breaks?

Response: *This task was included in the original solicitation by error. The task is being deleted by this amendment. Please review the revised Section C.*

75. Task 16. Should the Contractor plan for an expert meeting to be held in 2002 and annually thereafter, or 2003 and annually thereafter? For proposal costing purposes, please establish a dollar amount to be used by offerors for travel and lodging costs for participants since the requirement as stated is too vague to provide meaningful cost data for use in a competitive evaluation. In the absence of a dollar amount, please provide starting points for each proposed participant and an escalation factor to be used for airfares. Please state whether non refundable airline tickets are acceptable. Please state what advance notice (e.g., time frame) the Contractor will have for setting up the meeting. Please state whether costs should be included in the Coordinating Center budget for coffee and other refreshments at meeting breaks. Are the participants expected to be experts from different parts of the country? How are these individuals chosen?

Response: *This task was included in the original solicitation by error. The task is being deleted by this amendment. Please review the revised Section C.*

76. Task 23. For proposal costing purposes, please establish a dollar amount to be used by offerors for travel and lodging costs for Partners since the requirement as stated is too vague to provide meaningful cost data for use in a competitive evaluation. In the absence of a dollar amount, please provide starting points for each proposed Partner and an escalation factor to be used for airfares. Please state whether non refundable airline tickets are acceptable. Please state what advance notice (e.g., time frame) the Contractor will have for setting up the meeting. Please state whether costs should be included in the Coordinating Center budget for coffee and other refreshments at meeting breaks. Are the Partners expected to be from different parts of the country? How are Partners chosen?

Response: *This task was included in the original solicitation by error. The task is being deleted by this amendment. Please review the revised Section C.*

77. RFP Section F. Delivery Schedule - For Tasks 10, 13, 16, 17, and 18, due dates of October 2002, October 2002, May 2003, September 2002, and November 2002 respectively are stated. Are these due dates based on a specific contract award date and if yes, what is that date? If the contract is awarded subsequently after that date, will these dates change? Please clarify.

Response: *AHRQ anticipates award of the EPC Coordinating Center in July-August 2002. Adjustments will be made to the schedule of deliverables as warranted.*

78. RFP Section L.8c. Technical Proposal Instructions, Key Personnel - Is the position Director of the EPC Coordinating Center required to be a full-time 40 hour/week position filled by a single individual?

Response: *It is expected that the position will be filled by a single individual. The level of effort is to be sufficient to ensure appropriate oversight of work anticipated under this contract.*

79. Please confirm that the requirement for a Small Disadvantaged Business Participation Plan does not apply to small businesses. Please confirm that small businesses submitting proposals will automatically receive 5 points for Evaluation factor 5 as stated on page 76 of the solicitation.

Response: As stated in Section L.10, all offerors, regardless of size, shall submit a Small Disadvantaged Business (SDB) Participation Plan. This is required as the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) requires that the extent of participation in Small Disadvantaged Business concerns in performance of the contract shall be evaluated in unrestricted acquisitions expected to exceed \$500,000. The FAR does not exempt small business concerns from this evaluation. AHRQ will evaluate the SDB Participation Plan and will assign a score between 0-5. Those offerors who do not submit a SDB Participation Plan will receive a score of "0." Small businesses, however, do not have to submit the Small Business Subcontracting Plan. Small Business Subcontracting Plans are reviewed and may be negotiated with the successful offeror, but they are not scored.

80. With respect to Evaluation Factor 4, Past Performance, on pages 75-76 of the solicitation, we strongly object to all uses of the term "grant" and respectfully request that it be deleted. Grants and contracts are not equivalent for purposes of this evaluation factor and its use could be construed as bias by the agency for an academic institution as Contractor.

Response: *We agree and the term "grant" has been deleted. Questionnaires received on grants will not be evaluated.*

81. Please provide the government's estimate of the level of effort for this solicitation (by labor category if possible).

Response: *Each offeror should propose their own best estimate of the level of effort required for the work under this solicitation.*

REVISED: APRIL 15, 2002

SECTION C
DESCRIPTION/SPECIFICATION/WORK STATEMENT

EPC Coordinating Center

Independently and not as an agent of the Government, the Offeror shall furnish all the necessary services, qualified personnel, materials, equipment, and facilities, not otherwise provided by the Government, as needed to perform the Statement of Work (SOW) as described in the following sections.

The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) intends to award one contract to an entity which shall be designated as the Evidence-based Practice Center Coordinating Center (EPC Coordinating Center). The purpose of this Request For Proposals (RFP) is to establish and implement a Coordinating Center that will serve as a resource and support Center linking AHRQ, its EPCs, Partners, researchers, providers, and others committed to evidence-based health care. AHRQ will obtain services to be performed under this contract through an established set of core tasks, but also may assign an additional task(s) in the event of unanticipated programmatic need.

A. Background

The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) was established in 1989 as the Agency for Health Care Policy and Research. Its reauthorizing legislation (42 U.S.C. 299 et seq; "Healthcare Research and Quality Act of 1999") renamed the Agency as the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) and established it as the lead Federal agency for enhancing the quality, appropriateness, and effectiveness of health services and access to such services. To achieve these goals, the Agency conducts and supports a broad base of scientific research and promotion of improvements in clinical and health system practices, including the prevention of diseases and other health conditions.

AHRQ sponsors and conducts research that develops and presents evidence-based information on healthcare outcomes, quality, cost, use and access. AHRQ also sponsors and conducts research on existing as well as innovative technologies, and conducts research on methods for measuring quality and strategies for improving quality. Included in AHRQ's mandate is support of synthesis and dissemination of available scientific evidence, including dissemination research and analytic methods or systems for rating the strength of scientific evidence. The research findings and syntheses help providers, clinicians, payors, patients, and policymakers in making evidence-based decisions regarding the quality and effectiveness of health care.

In June 1997, AHRQ (then, AHCPR) established the Evidence-based Practice Center Program (EPC Program) in its effort to improve the quality, effectiveness and appropriateness of clinical practice. AHRQ awarded 5-year cost reimbursement contracts to 12 institutions and designated them as Evidence-based Practice Centers (EPCs). Since 1997, the EPCs have developed more than 80 evidence reports and technology assessments on a wide spectrum of topics, both clinical and policy-oriented. Visit AHRQ's website at <http://www.ahrq.gov/clinic/epcix.htm> for information about EPC evidence reports published between 1999 and 2001.

The EPC evidence reports and technology assessments are used by systems of care, provider societies, health plans, public and private purchasers, States, and others, as a scientific foundation for development and implementation of their own clinical practice guidelines, clinical pathways, review criteria, performance measures, and other clinical quality improvements tools. EPC reports related to the effectiveness or appropriateness of specific health care technologies are used to inform treatment decisions and coverage or reimbursement policies.

On January 18, 2002 AHRQ released an RFP to re-compete the EPC contracts for a second five-year period of performance (EPC II). AHRQ anticipates award of 10-14 EPC contracts. Under the expanded EPC II program, the EPCs may be tasked to provide a range of services. For example, in addition to systematic literature reviews and analyses, an EPC may (1) perform special analyses, such as meta-analyses, cost effectiveness analyses, decision analyses; (2) perform special cost studies; (3) update EPC reports and assessments; (4) undertake methods research; (5) collaborate with academic medical centers, payors and employer groups, non-profits, and other private sector entities in, for example, developing evidence-based curricula, providing training opportunities in systematic reviews and assessments, or conducting educational sessions on interpretation and understanding of evidence-based research studies; teach principles of evidence-based systematic review methodology; (6) provide technical assistance to organizations that seek to use EPC evidence reports and technology assessments as a basis for developing tools to enhance the quality and effectiveness of patient care; (7) scan published and grey literature to identify topics that may be ripe for development of an evidence report or technology assessment; (8) evaluate the use and impact of evidence reports and technology assessments on the quality, outcomes, and costs of healthcare; and (9) other assignments as requested.

B. Objectives

The objectives for the EPC Coordinating Center are based on its primary purpose, which is to function as an extension of the Agency in certain defined areas. Specifically, the EPC Coordinating Center will (a) serve as a central link between AHRQ, the EPCs, Partners (i.e., organizations become AHRQ Partners when AHRQ accepts their nominated topics for an EPC evidence report or technology assessment), researchers, providers, and others who are committed to the organization and delivery of evidence-based health care; (b) provide technical assistance to Partners on, for example, methods or mechanisms for dissemination of Partner-developed products (e.g., clinical practice guidelines, performance measures, educational criteria, etc.) that are based on EPC reports, and methods by which Partners may measure use of these products, and the impact of such use on clinical care; (c) collect and provide data to AHRQ for monitoring EPC Program performance; and, (d) facilitate communication and sharing of ideas between the EPCs. In addition to new EPCs identified in June/July 2002, the

Coordinating Center also will interact with current EPCs until their current task orders for AHRQ have been completed. The Coordinating Center also will interact with the Partners associated with current EPC task orders for 3 years following EPC submission of these evidence reports and assessments to AHRQ.

C. Specific Requirements

Coordinating Center-AHRQ-EPC Program Interface

Throughout the contract's period of performance, annually or as otherwise specified, the Contractor shall proceed with tasks only with prior approval of the Project Officer. The Project Officer will be a staff member of AHRQ's Center for Practice and Technology Assessment (CPTA). The CPTA Project Officer will work with the Contractor to coordinate tasks that require Contractor information to be provided to, or receive input from, the AHRQ Office of Health Care Information (OHCI) such as, but not limited to, publicizing upcoming national conferences, informing the Secretary of DHHS about Partner and EPC activities, publication of all EPC-related products, and similar information-sharing opportunities.

The Contractor shall develop, implement, and maintain an EPC Coordinating Center to provide support between AHRQ, its EPCs and Partners, researchers, providers, etc., in order to promote the organization and delivery of evidence-based health care. The Contractor's staff must have the appropriate mix of methodologic, content, and administrative experience and expertise to carry out interrelated tasks in the following broad areas: (a) Development and evaluation of scientific literature and data; (b) Technical assistance to Partners; (c) Management of electronic database; and (d) Administrative support to AHRQ.

Tasks To Be Performed

1. Meet with the Project Officer to discuss the role of the EPC Coordinating Center, to ensure common understanding of the work envisioned under this contract. As a result of this meeting, develop a comprehensive plan covering 01 and subsequent years (out year tasks may be subsequently revised to reflect new priorities) for the Project Officer's review. The Project Officer will develop, in consultation with the Contractor, the time sequence for onset of each task. The work plan will be updated on an annual basis.
2. Develop and submit for Project Officer's review the topic-specific search strategies by which the Contractor will perform literature searches ("reconnaissance") on topics for which EPC evidence reports are requested.
3. Develop and submit for Project Officer review the criteria by which the Contractor will evaluate the quality and relevance of studies identified in the literature searches.
4. Perform literature searches on proposed topics for EPC evidence reports, using the search strategies developed for this purpose. For planning purposes, assume literature searches on up to 20 topics per year.
5. Evaluate the quality and relevance of such literature according to the criteria developed for this purpose. For planning purposes, assume up to 20 topics per year.

6. Submit a report to the Project Officer detailing the results of the topic-specific literature searches, and the evaluation of the quality and relevance of the topic-specific literature. The report is to include the Contractor's opinion as to whether there are sufficient relevant and credible scientific studies to support a systematic review and analysis of each topic searched.
7. Develop and submit for Project Officer approval a strategy for assessing the need for updating prior EPC evidence reports and technology assessments, including criteria for prioritizing the updating cycle.
8. Utilizing the results of the update needs assessment and criteria, provide the Project Officer with an annual projection of what EPC reports and assessments should be updated, along with the basis for this opinion.
9. Develop criteria and protocols by which the EPCs will scan published and grey (e.g., unpublished studies, conference proceedings, etc.) literature in order to identify topics that may be ripe for development of an evidence report or technology assessment. Submit the criteria and protocols, and the basis or rationale for same, to the Project Officer.
10. Develop and submit to the Project Officer, a plan for the AHRQ annual conference "Translating Research Into Practice (TRIP)". The plan is to include several dates in 2003 for the first of these annual conferences, possible sites, overarching conference theme, etc. For planning purposes, assume a 2 and one-half day conference in the Washington metropolitan area, with attendance of 300 persons, and provide a projected dollar figure for the registration fee. The Contractor will plan a TRIP Conference to be held in 2003 and annually thereafter.
11. Work closely with AHRQ staff and others to fully develop and implement the TRIP conference. Travel and lodging costs for non-Federal keynote speakers, honoraria for those speakers, and other routine meeting management costs should be included in the Contractor's budget. For planning purposes, assume travel and lodging costs and honoraria of \$2,000 each, for four (4) non-Federal keynote speakers.
12. Provide technical assistance (e.g., methods, processes, other guidance) to Partners on how Partners can (a) effectively disseminate Partner-developed products that are based on EPC reports and assessments (e.g., clinical practice guidelines, performance measures, educational curricula, etc.) to their members; and (b) measure members' use of the Partner-developed products, as well as measure the impact of that use on clinical care. For planning purposes, assume up to 50 Partners will request technical assistance over the course of this 5-year contract.
13. Develop and submit to the Project Officer a method for receiving information from the Partners regarding Partner efforts to (a) translate the EPC reports and assessments into clinical practice guidelines, performance measures, educational curricula, etc; (b) disseminate the resultant derivative products; and (c) measure use of these products, and the impact of such use on clinical care. For planning purposes, on a calendar year

basis, assume up to 15 EPC evidence reports and technology assessments will be completed. Assume 15 primary Partners (those who originally nominated the report topic) for these reports and assessments plus up to 10 additional organizations that expressed interest in the topic and played an active role with the primary Partners in its development.

14. Beginning with publication of an EPC evidence report or technology assessment, and continuing for 3 years thereafter, stay abreast of the primary Partners' activities (and other organizational Partners, if any) in (a) timely translation of the EPC reports into clinical guidelines, educational curricula, performance measures, or reimbursement policies; (b) Partners' dissemination of these derivative products to their membership and others; and (c) measuring their members' use of the Partner-developed products, and impact of such use on clinical care.
15. Beginning with publication of an EPC evidence report or technology assessment, and on an annual basis for 3 years thereafter, collect information from the EPCs regarding translation, dissemination, and use of EPC reports by any public and private sector organizations.
16. Prepare and submit to the Project Officer an annual report on all Partners' activities, and information provided by the EPCs, as outlined in tasks #14 and #15.
17. Develop and submit to the Project Officer a Partners' guide that discusses the roles and responsibilities of organizations whose topic nominations are selected by AHRQ for development of an EPC evidence report or technology assessment.
18. Serve as a repository for EPC report-specific information necessary for updating reports by either the private sector or by the EPCs. Beginning in 2003, the Contractor is to establish and implement a database to house the following information specific to each EPC report or assessment: (a) entire study bibliography; (b) reference list; (c) detailed search strategy, including terms, exclusions (date, language, and study type parameters, etc.); (d) inclusion and exclusion criteria for assessing study relevancy; and (e) for all excluded studies, reasons for exclusion. The EPCs will submit this information to the Contractor at the completion of each report, on CD-ROM using commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) software. The CD-ROM will contain, as necessary, associated software design specifications, stored procedure specifications, indexing, data model(s), and other system specifications and associated documentation.

The Contractor shall design and maintain the database such that the information is retrievable, at minimum, by report topic, title, date of publication, and name of the EPC. The Contractor shall use commercial off-the-shelf software (COTS) in developing the database. For budgeting purposes, assume that the Contractor will respond to 50 requests per year for information in the database.

19. Develop a process by which the Coordinating Center will stay apprised of EPC efforts to achieve journal publication of manuscripts based on their evidence reports or technology assessments, including establishment of an informal template to capture (a) title and authors of manuscript; (b) name of journal that accepts the manuscript for

publication; (c) full and complete journal citation information; and, (d) expected date of publication.

20. Provide electronic notification to the Project Officer no later than four weeks prior to journal publication of each EPC article, to facilitate AHRQ's drafting of a press release, if desired.
21. Work through and with the Project Officer to provide information to, and receive input from, AHRQ's Office of Health Care Information (OHCI) regarding EPC and Partner activities, such as, but not limited to, public affairs press releases, information to the Secretary of DHHS, publication of all EPC-related products, etc. For planning purposes, assume 12 such tasks on an annual basis.
22. Collect and provide other EPC programmatic data, as AHRQ requests, to support AHRQ's need to have quick, accurate, and current information related to performance of the EPC Program.
23. On a monthly basis, provide the Project Officer with a report on all work performed under this contract for the preceding month.

SECTION L - INSTRUCTIONS, CONDITIONS AND NOTICES TO OFFERORS

**L.1 SOLICITATION PROVISIONS INCORPORATED BY REFERENCE (FEB 1998)
(FAR 52.252-1)**

This solicitation incorporates the following solicitation provisions by reference, with the same force and effect as if they were given in full text. Upon request, the contracting officer will make the full text available. Also, the full text of a clause may be assessed electronically at this address: <http://www.arnet.gov/far/>

- a. Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) (48 CFR Chapter 1) Solicitation Provisions
 - (1) 52.215-20 Requirements for Cost or Pricing Data or Information Other Than Cost or Pricing Data (OCT 1997)
 - (2) 52.215-16 Facilities Capital Cost of Money (OCT 1997)

L.2 DATA UNIVERSAL NUMBERING (DUNS) NUMBER (JUNE 1999) (FAR 52.204-6)

- (a) The offeror shall enter, in the block with its name and address on the cover page of its offer, the annotation "DUNS" followed by the DUNS number that identifies the offeror's name and address exactly as stated in the offer. The DUNS number is a nine-digit number assigned by Dun and Bradstreet Information Services.
- (b) If the offeror does not have a DUNS number, it should contact Dun and Bradstreet directly to obtain one. A DUNS number will be provided immediately by telephone at no charge to the offeror. For information on obtaining a DUNS number, the offeror, if located within the United States, should call Dun and Bradstreet at 1-800-333-0505. The offeror should be prepared to provide the following information:
 - (1) Company name.
 - (2) Company address.
 - (3) Company telephone number.
 - (4) Line of business.
 - (5) Chief executive officer/key manager.
 - (6) Date the company was started.
 - (7) Number of people employed by the company.
 - (8) Company affiliation.
- (c) Offerors located outside the United States may obtain the location and phone number of the local Dun and Bradstreet Information Services office from the Internet home page at <http://www.customerservice@dnb.com/>. If an offeror is unable to locate a local service center, it may send an e-mail to Dun and Bradstreet at globalinfo@mail.dnb.com.

(End of provision)

**L.3 INSTRUCTIONS TO OFFERORS - COMPETITIVE ACQUISITION (MAY 2001)
ALTERNATE I (OCT 1997)(FAR 52.215-1)**

(a) *Definitions.* As used in this provision –

“Discussions” are negotiations that occur after establishment of the competitive range that may, at the Contracting Officer’s discretion, result in the offeror being allowed to revise its proposal.

“In writing,” “writing,” or “written” means any worded or numbered expression which can be read, reproduced, and later communicated, and includes electronically transmitted and stored information.

“Proposal modification” is a change made to a proposal before the solicitation’s closing date and time, or made in response to an amendment, or made to correct a mistake at any time before award.

“Proposal revision” is a change to a proposal made after the solicitation closing date, at the request of or as allowed by a Contracting Officer as the result of negotiations.

“Time,” if stated as a number of days, is calculated using calendar days, unless otherwise specified, and will include Saturdays, Sundays, and legal holidays. However, if the last day falls on a Saturday, Sunday or legal holiday, then the period shall include the next working day.

(b) *Amendments to solicitations.* If this solicitation is amended, all terms and conditions that are not amended remain unchanged. Offerors shall acknowledge receipt of any amendment to this solicitation by the date and time specified in the amendment(s).

(c) *Submission, modification, revision, and withdrawal of proposals.*

(1) Unless other methods (e.g., electronic commerce or facsimile) are permitted in the solicitation, proposals and modifications to proposals shall be submitted in paper media in sealed envelopes or packages (i) addressed to the office specified in the solicitation, and (ii) showing the time and date specified for receipt, the solicitation number, and the name and address of the offeror. Offerors using commercial carriers should ensure that the proposal is marked on the outermost wrapper with the information in paragraphs (c)(1)(i) and (c)(1)(ii) of this provision.

(2) The first page of the proposal must show—

(i) The solicitation number;

(ii) The name, address, and telephone and facsimile numbers of the offeror (and electronic address if available);

- (iii) A statement specifying the extent of agreement with all terms, conditions, and provisions included in the solicitation and agreement to furnish any or all items upon which prices are offered at the price set opposite each item;
 - (iv) Names, titles, and telephone and facsimile numbers (and electronic addresses if available) of persons authorized to negotiate on the offeror's behalf with the Government in connection with this solicitation; and
 - (v) Name, title, and signature of person authorized to sign the proposal. Proposals signed by an agent shall be accompanied by evidence of that agent's authority, unless that evidence has been previously furnished to the issuing office.
- (3) *Submissions, modification, revision, and withdrawal of proposals.*
- (i) Offerors are responsible for submitting proposals, and any modification or revisions, so as to reach the Government office designated in the solicitation by the time specified in the solicitation. If no time is specified in the solicitation, the time for receipt is 4:30 p.m., local time, for the designated Government office on the date that proposal or revision is due.
 - (ii) (A) Any proposal, modification, or revision received at the Government office designated in the solicitation after the exact time specified for receipt of offers is "late" and will not be considered unless it is received before award is made, the Contracting Officer determines that accepting the late offer would not unduly delay the acquisition; and -
 - (1) If it was transmitted through an electronic commerce method authorized by the solicitation, it was received at the initial point of entry to the Government infrastructure not later than 5:00 p.m. one working day prior to the date specified for receipt of proposals; or
 - (2) There is acceptable evidence to establish that it was received at the Government installation designated for receipt of offers and was under the Government's control prior to the time set for receipt of offers; or
 - (3) It is the only proposal received.
 - (B) However, a late modification of an otherwise successful proposal that makes its terms more favorable to the Government, will be considered at any time it is received and may be accepted.

- (iii) Acceptable evidence to establish the time of receipt at the Government installation includes the time/date stamp of that installation on the proposal wrapper, other documentary evidence of receipt maintained by the installation, or oral testimony or statements of Government personnel.
 - (iv) If an emergency or unanticipated event interrupts normal Government processes so that proposals cannot be received at the office designated for receipt of proposals by the exact time specified in the solicitation, and urgent Government requirements preclude amendment of the solicitation, the time specified for receipt of proposals 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.
 - (v) Proposals may be withdrawn by written notice received at any time before award. Oral proposals in response to oral solicitations may be withdrawn orally. If the solicitation authorizes facsimile proposals, proposals may be withdrawn via facsimile received at any time before award, subject to the conditions specified in the provision at 52.215-5, "Facsimile Proposals." Proposals may be withdrawn in person by an offeror or an authorized representative, if the representative's identity is made known and the representative signs a receipt for the proposal before award.
- (4) Unless otherwise specified in the solicitation, the offeror may propose to provide any item or combination of items.
 - (5) Offerors shall submit proposals submitted in response to this solicitation in English, unless otherwise permitted by the solicitation, and in U.S. dollars, unless the provision at FAR 52.225-17, Evaluation of Foreign Currency Offers, is included in the solicitation.
 - (6) Offerors may submit modifications to their proposals at any time before the solicitation closing date and time, and may submit modifications in response to an amendment, or to correct a mistake at any time before award.
 - (7) Offers may submit revised proposals only if requested or allowed by the Contracting Officer.
 - (8) Proposals may be withdrawn at any time before award. Withdrawals are effective upon receipt of notice by the Contracting Officer.

- (d) *Offer expiration date.* Proposals in response to this solicitation will be valid for the number of days specified on the solicitation cover sheet (unless a different period is proposed by the offeror).
- (e) *Restriction on disclosure and use of data.* Offerors that include in their proposals data that they do not want disclosed to the public for any purpose, or used by the Government except for evaluation purposes, shall —
- (1) Mark the title page with the following legend:

This proposal includes data that shall not be disclosed outside the Government and shall not be duplicated, used, or disclosed—in whole or in part—for any purpose other than to evaluate this proposal. If, however, a contract is awarded to this offeror as a result of—or in connection with—the submission of this data, the Government shall have the right to duplicate, use, or disclose the data to the extent provided in the resulting contract. This restriction does not limit the Government’s right to use information contained in this data if it is obtained from another source without restriction. The data subject to this restriction are contained in sheets [insert numbers or other identification of sheets]; and
 - (2) Mark each sheet of data it wishes to restrict with the following legend:

Use or disclosure of data contained on this sheet is subject to the restriction on the title page of this proposal.
- (f) *Contract award.*
- (1) The Government intends to award a contract or contracts resulting from this solicitation to the responsible offeror(s) whose proposal(s) represents the best value after evaluation in accordance with the factors and subfactors in the solicitation.
 - (2) The Government may reject any or all proposals if such action is in the Government’s interest.
 - (3) The Government may waive informalities and minor irregularities in proposals received.
 - (4) The Government intends to evaluate proposals and award a contract after conducting discussions with offerors (except clarifications as described in FAR 15.306(a)). Therefore, the offeror’s initial proposal should contain the offeror’s best terms for a cost or price and technical standpoint. The Government reserves the right to conduct discussions if the Contracting Officer later determines them to be necessary. If the Contracting Officer determines that the number of proposals that would otherwise be in the competitive range exceeds the number at which an efficient competition can be conducted, the Contracting Officer may limit the number of

proposals in the competitive range to the greatest number that will permit an efficient competition among the most highly rated proposals.

- (5) The Government reserves the right to make an award on any item for a quantity less than the quantity offered, at the unit cost or prices offered, unless the offeror specifies otherwise in the proposal.
- (6) The Government reserves the right to make multiple awards if, after considering the additional administrative costs, it is in the Government's best interest to do so.
- (7) Exchanges with offerors after receipt of a proposal do not constitute a rejection or counteroffer by the Government.
- (8) The Government may determine that a proposal is unacceptable if the prices proposed are materially unbalanced between line items or subline items. Unbalanced pricing exists when, despite an acceptable total evaluated price, the price of one or more contract line items is significantly overstated or understated as indicated by the application of cost or price analysis techniques. A proposal may be rejected if the Contracting Officer determines that the lack of balance poses an unacceptable risk to the Government.
- (9) If a cost realism analysis is performed, cost realism may be considered by the source selection authority in evaluating performance or schedule risk.
- (10) A written award or acceptance of proposal mailed or otherwise furnished to the successful offeror within the time specified in the proposal shall result in a binding contract without further action by either party.
- (11) The Government may disclose the following information in postaward debriefings to other offerors:
 - (i) The overall evaluated cost or price and technical rating of the successful offeror.
 - (ii) The overall ranking of all offerors, when any ranking was developed by the agency during source selection;
 - (iii) A summary of the rationale for award; and
 - (iv) For acquisitions of commercial items, the make and model of the item to be delivered by the successful offeror.

(End of provision)

L.4 TYPE OF CONTRACT (APRIL 1984)(FAR 52.216-1)

The Government contemplates award of a cost reimbursement, completion type contract resulting from this solicitation.

It is anticipated that a single award will be made from this solicitation and that the award will be made on/about July or August 2002.

L.5 SERVICE OF PROTEST (AUG 1996) (FAR 52.233-2)

- (a) Protests, as defined in Section 33.101 of the Federal Acquisition Regulation, that are filed directly with an agency, and copies of any protests that are filed with the General Accounting Office (GAO) shall be served on the Contracting Officer (addressed as follows) by obtaining written and dated acknowledgment of receipt from:

Director, Division of Contracts Management
Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality
2101 East Jefferson Street, Suite 502
Rockville, Maryland 20852

- (b) The copy of any protest shall be received in the office designated above within one day of filing a protest with the GAO.

L.6 POINT OF CONTACT FOR TECHNICAL INQUIRIES

The technical contact for additional information and answering inquiries is the Contracting Officer.

All questions regarding this solicitation shall be in writing and received by the Contracting Officer no later than **April 4, 2002**. Answers to questions shall be sent to each prospective offeror by solicitation amendment.

Questions should be sent both in hard copy (by mail or fax) **AND** electronically via e-mail with the questions provided as an attachment either in Word or WordPerfect format to Sharon Williams, swilliam@ahrq.gov.

Mail inquiries to: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality
 Division of Contracts Management
 2101 East Jefferson Street, Suite 502
 Rockville, MD 20852
 Attention: Sharon Williams, Contracting Officer
 Fax: (301) 443-7523

L.7 GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

Introduction

The following instructions will establish the acceptable minimum requirements for the format and contents of proposals. Special attention is directed to the requirements for technical and business proposals to be submitted in accordance with these instructions:

- a. Contract Type and General Provisions: It is contemplated that a cost-type contract will be awarded. In addition to the special provisions of this request for proposal (RFP), any resultant contract shall include the general clauses applicable to the selected offeror's organization and type of contract awarded. Any additional clauses required by Public Law, Executive Order, or procurement regulations, in effect at the time of execution of the proposed contract, will be included.
- b. Authorized Official and Submission of Proposal: The proposal shall be signed by an official authorized to bind your (the offeror's) organization. Your proposal shall be submitted in the number of copies, to the address, and marked as indicated in the cover letter of this solicitation. Proposals will be typewritten, reproduced on letter sized paper and will be legible in all required copies. To expedite the proposal evaluation, the following individually bound documents are required for responding to the RFP:
 - I. TECHNICAL PROPOSAL: See Technical Proposal Instructions for recommended format (L.8). Please mark as original or copy.
 - II. PAST PERFORMANCE INFORMATION: See Past Performance Information Instructions for format (L.9). Please mark as original or copy.
 - III. SMALL DISADVANTAGED BUSINESS PARTICIPATION PLAN: See Small Disadvantaged Business Plan Instructions for format (L.10). Please mark as original or copy.
 - IV. BUSINESS PROPOSAL: (To include DHHS Small, Disadvantaged, Woman, HUBZone, Veteran-Owned Small Business Subcontracting Plan). See Business Proposal Instructions for recommended format (L.11). Please mark as original or copy.
- c. Separation of Technical, Past Performance Information, Small Disadvantaged Business Participation Plan and Business Proposal: The proposal shall be in four parts: (1) Technical Proposal; (2) Past Performance Information; (3) Small Disadvantaged Business Participation Plan; and (4) Business Proposal (which includes the Small Business Subcontracting Plan). Each of the parts shall be

separate and complete in itself so that evaluation of one may be accomplished independently of, and concurrently with, evaluation of the other. The technical proposal shall not contain reference to cost; however, resources information, such as data concerning labor hours and categories, materials, subcontracts, etc., shall be contained in the technical proposal so that your understanding of the Statement of Work (SOW) may be evaluated. It must disclose your technical approach in as much detail as possible, including, but not limited to, the requirements of the technical proposal instructions.

- d. Evaluation of Proposals: The Government will evaluate technical proposals in accordance with the criteria set forth in Section M, Evaluation/Award Criteria.
- e. Rejection of Proposals: The Government reserves the right to reject any or all proposals received. It is understood that your proposal will become part of the Government's official contract file.
- f. Unnecessarily Elaborate Proposals: Unnecessarily elaborate brochures or other presentations beyond those sufficient to present a complete and effective proposal are not desired and may be construed as an indication of the offeror's lack of cost consciousness and inability to concisely state their proposal . Elaborate art work, expensive visual and other presentation aids are neither necessary nor wanted.
- g. Privacy Act: The Privacy Act of 1974 (Public Law (P.L.) 93-579) requires that a Federal agency advise each individual whom it asks to supply information: 1) the authority which authorized the solicitation; 2) whether disclosure is voluntary or mandatory; (3) the principal purpose or purposes for which the information is intended to be used; (4) the uses outside the agency which may be made of the information; and 4) the effects on the individual, if any, of not providing all or any part of the requested information.

Therefore:

- (1) The Government is requesting the information called for in this RFP pursuant to the authority provided by Section 301(g) of the Public Health Service Act, as amended, and P.L. 92-218, as amended.
- (2) Provisions of the information requested are entirely voluntary.
- (3) The collection of this information is for the purpose of conducting an accurate, fair, and adequate review prior to a discussion as to whether to award a contract.
- (4) Failure to provide any or all of the requested information may result in a less than adequate review.
- (5) The information provided by you may be routinely disclosed for the following purposes:

- to the cognizant audit agency and the General Accounting Officer for auditing;
- to the Department of Justice as required for litigation;
- to respond to Congressional inquiries; and
- to qualified experts, not within the definition of Department employees for opinions as a part of the review process.

In addition, the Privacy Act of 1974 (P.L. 93-579, Section 7) requires that the following information be provided when individuals are requested to disclose their social security number.

Provision of the social security number is voluntary. Social security numbers are requested for the purpose of accurate and efficient identification, referral, review and management of AHRQ contracting programs. Authority for requesting this information is provided by Section 305 and Title IV of the Public Health Service Act, as amended.

- h. The RFP does not commit the Government to pay any cost for the preparation and submission of a proposal. It is also brought to your attention that the Contracting Officer is the only individual who can legally commit the Government to the expenditure of public funds in connection with this or any acquisition action.

The Government reserves the right to award a contract without discussions if the Contracting Officer determines that the initial prices are fair and reasonable and that discussions are not necessary.

L.8 TECHNICAL PROPOSAL INSTRUCTIONS

The technical proposal shall contain an original and thirteen (13) copies. The technical proposal described below shall be limited to **125 pages** not including resumes or bibliographies, with no less than a 11 point pitch, with the majority of the text double-spaced (lists of deliverables, person loading charts, and similar materials need not be double-spaced, so long as they are legible). Resumes or CVs are only required for key personnel. Brief biographic sketches of other personnel may be provided. Lengthy proposals and voluminous appendices are neither needed nor desired as they are difficult to read and evaluate and may indicate the offeror's inability to concisely state their proposal

- a. Recommended Technical Proposal Format

The Offeror's proposal should present sufficient information to reflect a thorough understanding of the work requirements and a detailed plan for achieving the objectives of the scope of work. Technical proposal shall not merely paraphrase the requirements of the Agency's scope of work or parts thereof, or use of phrases such as "will comply" or "standard technique will be employed." The technical proposal must include a detailed description of the techniques and procedures to be used in achieving the proposed end results in compliance with

the requirements of the Agency's scope of work.

To assist in the expeditious and comprehensive evaluation of your proposal, the Government desires that you follow the guidelines and format listed below:

- (1) Cover Page: The name of the proposing organization, author(s) of the technical proposal, the RFP number and the title of the RFP should appear on the cover. One (1) manually signed original copy of the proposal and the number of copies specified in the RFP are required.
- (2) Table of Contents: Provide sufficient detail so that all important elements of the proposal can be located readily.
- (3) Introduction: This should be a one or two page summary outlining the proposed work, your interest in submitting a proposal, and the importance of this effort in relation to your overall operation.
- (4) Technical Discussion: For ease of evaluation, the technical proposal shall be divided into three parts as follows, corresponding to the evaluation criteria in Section M:
 - A. Technical Approach
 - B. Key Personnel
 - C. Organizational Experience and Capabilities

Technical proposals submitted in response to this RFP shall address each of the items described below, and shall be organized in the same manner and within the page limitations specified. Proposals shall be prepared in double-spaced format, with numbered pages.

Technical Approach

Briefly, but in sufficient detail to demonstrate Offeror's knowledge, the offeror shall describe its understanding of the objectives and underlying need for this contract, the role and responsibilities of an EPC Coordinating Center, and discuss approaches to the different types of activities.

Key Personnel

The EPC Coordinating Center is to be comprised of experienced/seasoned professionals, including those with training and competencies in clinical care, research methodology, library sciences, science writing and editing, database management, and meeting planning and implementation. The Director of the EPC Coordinating Center and other senior staff who will manage the work to be performed under this contract should hold an advanced clinical, technical or professional degree, at the M.D. or Ph.D. level with a minimum of 8 years experience in performing evidence-based systematic reviews and analyzing biomedical, social sciences, behavioral, epidemiological or outcomes data, or similar scientific literature; and, preferably, will have significant experience related to development of tools such as clinical practice guidelines,

medical review criteria, and other performance measures; experience in innovative and cost effective ways to measure and assess impact of such tools on clinical care; and experience with working with professional societies and healthcare delivery systems, such as hospitals and health plans. Experience and expertise also is required for management of an electronic database, and planning/implementing large conferences.

Proposed staff, including consultants and subcontractors, shall have appropriate experience and skills to carry out tasks in the SOW. In addition to clinical training and experience, relevant areas of staff expertise and experience include, among others, library sciences with skill and experience in searching multiple complex databases of scientific literature; experience in performing systematic reviews; experience with research methodology, including clinical, social sciences, behavioral research, organization and financing research; meeting management; technical or scientific writing and editing; experience in dealing with professional societies, health services researchers, payors, and others who may seek technical assistance from the EPC Coordinating Center, as outlined in the SOW.

The proposal shall specify the Offeror's core staff, including the individual who will assume the role of Director of the EPC Coordinating Center; specify subcontractors and consultants as well. The offeror shall provide the qualifications and resumes of all proposed key project personnel, including consultants, subcontractors, and part-time employees. The offeror is expected to be specific in describing the proposed staff. Highly qualified staff are considered critical to the successful completion of projects envisioned under this contract.

Offerors shall describe their access to general and specialized clinical, behavioral, social sciences, economic and management expertise, and meeting management. AHRQ expects that over the five year life of the contract, EPC evidence reports and technology assessments may be developed in the following broad topic areas: adult health; child and adolescent health; women's health; minority health; geriatrics; dental health; mental health and substance abuse; rehabilitation; preventive care; complementary and alternative therapies; patient safety and medical errors; and, effective management of health care systems. Because the SOW under this RFP highlights inter alia the expertise to assess need for updating EPC evidence reports and technology assessments, perform searches of scientific literature and data, and analyze the quality of such data, and similar tasks of a scientific or technical nature, Offerors must describe their access to general and specialized clinical, behavioral, social sciences, economic, health systems management, and meeting management expertise.

The Contractor is not required to have all types of expertise available on a full-time basis. To ensure top performance of the tasks set forth in the SOW, however, the Offeror must demonstrate that there will be personnel with general clinical training and experience, with basic knowledge of biostatistics and epidemiology, with library sciences skills and experience, with scientific writing and editing expertise, and meeting management expertise, available either as core staff or as core staff plus rapid availability as consultants or subcontractors.

The Offeror's proposed Director of the EPC Coordinating Center shall be identified. This individual shall possess strong corporate level management experience, providing direction and oversight of all work performed under the contract, and assuring appropriate and timely responsiveness and cooperation of Contractor staff, consultants, and subcontractors, with Federal Government staff and policy officials. Of equal importance, the Director must have the

academic stature and experience to interact as knowledgeable peer with the EPCs and with professional societies, researchers, payors, and others, to identify and provide technical assistance as required.

The Offeror shall identify the proposed Project Managers. Project Managers are responsible for the day-to-day management of individual tasks. These individuals must be highly qualified, with significant leadership and communication skills, and demonstrated experience and competence in managing complex projects with similar or differing requirements. The Project Managers may have: general clinical training and experience; training and experience in critical evaluation of biomedical, social sciences, behavioral, and/or health services research (e.g., epidemiology, bio-statistics); or other technical training and experience that is appropriate to ensure successful completion of tasks under this contract.

Offerors shall provide appropriate staff , including personnel in the following labor classes:

Class I

Senior management personnel, holding an advanced clinical, technical or professional degree, at the M.D., Ph.D., or Masters level, with a minimum of 8 years experience in analyzing biomedical, social sciences, behavioral, medical effectiveness, epidemiological or outcomes data, or similar scientific literature, research findings and data, preferably with significant experience related to development of tools such as clinical practice guidelines, medical review criteria, quality measures or indicators, or patient safety and other performance measures; biomedical or social sciences literature reviews and syntheses; experience in innovative and cost effective ways to measure and assess impact of such tools on clinical care; and, experience in working with professional societies and healthcare delivery systems, such as hospitals and health plans. Class I personnel shall also have corporate level management experience that reflects an ability to command organizational resources and direct staff within the broader organization. The Director of the EPC Coordinating Center is Class I.

Class II

Associate management or clinical/professional/technical personnel, holding as advanced degree, at the M.D., Ph.D., or Master level, with a minimum of 5 years experience in analyzing biomedical, social sciences, medical effectiveness, epidemiological data, or similar scientific literature, research findings and data; and, experience in successfully managing projects similar to those envisioned in the SOW.

Class III

Intermediate clinical/technical personnel, holding a BS or BA degree and at least 3 years experience in technical activities of which 2 years experience are directly related to analysis of biomedical, social sciences, and related scientific literature and other data. The individual is capable of carrying out independent assignments with minimum supervision or acting as leader of small projects. Class III personnel includes specialists in science writing and editing, as well as computer programming.

Class IV

Data support, literature search and retrieval, report drafting, etc. at a research assistant level.

IV Organizational Experience and Capabilities

Offeror should discuss in sufficient detail to enable reviewers to understand the level of prior experience and corporate capabilities in carrying out work similar in kind and complexity to that in the EPC Coordinating Center SOW, including the overall plan for organizing, staffing, and managing the tasks required by this contract. The plan shall indicate how organizational roles and responsibilities will be divided, decisions made, work monitored, and quality and timeliness of products assured. The offeror shall explain how this management and staffing plan demonstrates offeror's capability to: start projects quickly; ensure that qualified personnel are available for individual assignments; conduct more than one task concurrently; complete complex tasks within narrow time frames; assure quality performance of each project; and, provide continuity of support over the multi-year period of performance required of the EPC Coordinating Center. In doing so, the Offeror shall provide a narrative showing understanding of the requirements in the Statement of Work (SOW) from a managerial perspective. The narrative should, at a minimum, address the following issues:

- C Level of expertise and experience of the proposed Director of the EPC Coordinating Center;
- C Level of expertise and experience of Project Manager(s), if proposed, in managing projects that contain such elements as search and evaluation of scientific literature; convening large annual conferences; conference calls, technical assistance to professional societies and other private-sector entities; electronic communications such as management of databases and responding to user inquiries; and report development and production.
- C Labor and skill mix determination (why Offeror chose the skill mix for this project);
- C Personnel selection and assignment (why an individual person was selected for an individual job);
- C Percentage of full time core personnel (Offeror shall provide detailed explanation of how the proposed staffing plan ensures that the work is conducted by individuals with a mastery of the technical requirements of the SOW);
- C Managerial problems Offeror expects to encounter. Describe ability and flexibility to rapidly solve the same or similar managerial problems encountered previously;
- C Ability/flexibility to respond rapidly to changes in budget, priorities, and schedule.
- C Indicate clear lines of authority and delineation of staff responsibilities.
- C Describe the number of person hours for each task.

- C Provide an organizational chart and chart showing all tasks (e.g., staffing plan).
- C Describe coordination with proposed consultants/subcontractors, including monitoring of their performance.
- C Provide a signed agreement, e.g., letter of commitment, between the Offeror and subcontractors and any personnel other than current direct employees, including dates of service and specific tasks to be performed.

L.9 Past Performance Information

Offerors shall submit the following information as part of their proposal for both the Offeror and proposed subcontractors:

- A. A list of the last five (5) contracts and subcontracts completed during the past three years and all contracts and subcontracts currently in process. Contracts listed may include those entered into by the Federal Government, agencies of State and local governments, and commercial customers. Offerors that are newly formed entities without prior contracts should list contracts and subcontracts as required for all key personnel. Include the following information for each contract and subcontract:
 - a: Name of contracting activity
 - b: Contract number
 - c: Contract type
 - d: Total contract value
 - e: Contract work
 - f: Contracting Officer and telephone number
 - g: Program Manager and telephone number
 - h: Administrative Contracting Officer, if different from item f, and telephone number
 - i: List of major subcontracts
- B. The Offeror may provide information on problems encountered on the contracts and subcontracts identified in (1) above and corrective actions taken to resolve those problems. **Offerors should not provide general information on their performance on the identified contracts. General performance information will be obtained from the Offeror's references.**
- C. The Offeror may describe any quality awards or certifications that may indicate the Offeror possesses a high-quality process for developing and producing the product or service required. Identify what segment of the organization (one division or the entire organization) that received the award or certification. Describe when the award or certification was bestowed. If the award or certification is over three years old, present evidence that the qualifications still apply.

- D. Each Offeror will be evaluated on its performance under existing and prior contracts for similar products or services. Performance information will be used for both responsibility determinations and as an evaluation factor against which Offeror's relative rankings will be compared to assure best value to the Government. The Government will focus on information that demonstrates quality of performance relative to the size and complexity of the procurement under consideration. References other than those identified by the Offeror may be contacted by the Government with the information received used in the evaluation of the Offeror's past performance.

The attached Past Performance Questionnaire and Contractor Performance Form shall be completed by those contracting organizations listed in (1) above. The evaluation forms shall be completed and forwarded directly to the following:

Sharon Williams
Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality
Contracts Management Staff
2101 East Jefferson Street, Suite 502
Rockville, Maryland 20852

FAX: 301-443-7523

Evaluation questionnaires must be received by **April 26, 2002** in order to be included in the review process. Questionnaires received after April 26, 2002, will not be considered in the past performance rating. It is the responsibility of the offeror to ensure that these documents are forwarded to the Contracting Officer.

L.10 Small Disadvantaged Business Participation Plan

In accordance with FAR Part 15.304(c)4, the extent of participation of Small Disadvantaged Business (SDB) concerns in performance of the contract shall be evaluated in unrestricted acquisitions expected to exceed a total estimated cost of \$500,000 (\$1,000,000 for construction) subject to certain limitations (see FAR 19.201 and 19.1202).

- A. All offerors, regardless of size, shall submit the following information in an original and one copy:

A plan on the extent of participation of Small Disadvantaged Business concerns in performance of the contract. Participation in performance of the contract includes the work expected to be performed by SDB concern(s). This can include SDB (as prime contractor), joint ventures, teaming arrangements, and subcontracts. Include the following information in SDB participation plans:

1. The extent of an offeror's commitment to use SDB concerns. Commitment should be as specific as possible, i.e., are subcontract arrangements already in place, letters of commitment, etc. Enforceable commitments will be weighted more heavily than non-enforceable ones.

2. Specifically identify the SDB concerns with point of contact and phone number.
 3. The complexity and variety of the work SDB concerns are to perform.
 4. Realism for the use of SDB in the proposal.
 5. Past performance of the Offeror in complying with subcontracting plans for SDB concerns.
 6. Targets expressed as dollars and percentage of total contract value for each participating SDB; which will be incorporated into and become part of any resulting contract.
 7. The extent of participation of SDB concerns in terms of the total acquisition.
- B. SDB participation information will be used for both responsibility determinations and as an evaluation factor against which offeror's relative rankings will be compared to assure the best value to the Government. The Government will focus on information that demonstrates realistic commitments to use SDB concerns relative to the size and complexity of the acquisition under consideration. The Government is not required to contact all references provided by the offeror. Also, references other than those identified by the offeror may be contacted by the Government to obtain additional information that will be used in the evaluation of the offeror's commitment to SDB participation.

L.11 BUSINESS PROPOSAL

The offeror shall submit as part of the proposal a separate enclosure titled "Business Proposal." The Business Proposal shall include the Cost/Price Proposal, the Small Business Subcontracting Plan, and Other Administrative Data in accordance with the following:

- A. Cost/Price Proposal
1. A cost proposal, in the amount of an original and three (3) copies submitted in accordance with FAR 15, in a format similar to Attachment 5. The offeror's own format may be used, but all required information in Attachment 5 shall be provided.

The business proposal must contain sufficient information to allow the Government to perform a basic analysis of the proposed cost or price of the work. This information shall include the amounts of the basic elements of the proposed cost or price.

As appropriate, cost breakdowns shall be provided for the following cost elements:

(a) Direct Labor

The estimated cost for all personnel who will be assigned for direct work on this project shall be included. Give the name, title, percent of effort or time, salary and fringe benefits, for each employee.

Salary increases that are anticipated during performance of a resultant contract should be proposed as a cost. If escalation is included, state the degree (percent) and methodology, e.g., annual flat rate applied to a base rate as of a specific date or a mid-pointed rate for the period of performance. State whether any additional direct labor (new hires) will be required during the performance period of this procurement. If so, state the number required and anticipated date of hire. Also, specify the month and day on which your fiscal year commences.

(b) Supplies and Equipment

Include description, unit price, quantity, total price, justification for purchasing or leasing items and the basis for pricing (vendor quotes, invoice prices, etc.).

(c) Travel

The amount proposed for travel shall be supported with a breakdown which includes purpose, destination, duration, and estimated cost (transportation and per diem) for each proposed trip. If travel costs are proposed on the basis of your organization's established travel policy, a copy of the policy must be provided.

(d) Consultants

This element should include names(s) of consultant, number of days, and daily rate. The method of obtaining each consultant, either sole source or competitive, and the degree of competition or the rationale for sole source shall be explained.

(e) Subcontractors

Subcontractor costs shall be broken down and supported by cost and pricing data adequate to establish the reasonableness of the proposed amount. Support documentation should include degree of subcontract competition and basis for selecting source.

(f) Other Direct Costs

Any proposed other direct costs shall be supported with breakdown outlining the separate costs proposed and details supporting the formulation of the costs proposed. A signed agreement between the offeror and any personnel other than direct employees that includes dates of employment, salary, and specific tasks to be performed should be included.

(g) Indirect Costs

Indicate how you have computed and applied indirect costs, and provide a basis for evaluating the reasonableness of the proposed rates.

2. Certified documentation indicating that the offeror has a cost accounting system in place which allows for the collection, tracking and reporting of all costs under a cost reimbursement-type contract.
3. Certified documentation that the offeror has a current indirect cost rate agreement in place with a federal agency or that is in the process of obtaining or revising such an agreement. A copy of the indirect cost rate agreement or the proposed rate agreement shall be provided.

- B. Small Business Subcontracting Plan: All offerors except for small businesses are required to submit a subcontracting plan in accordance with the Small Business Subcontracting Plan, FAR 52.219-9, incorporated in this solicitation. A copy of the AHRQ model subcontracting plan is provided as an attachment to this solicitation. If the model plan is not used, all elements outlined must be addressed in the offeror's format. **If the offeror is a not a small business and fails to submit a subcontracting plan with the initial proposal, the offeror will be considered nonresponsive and their proposal will be returned without further consideration.** The subcontracting plan should be submitted with the business proposal.

This provision does not apply to small business concerns. This provision does apply to all other offerors, including large business concerns, colleges, universities, and non-profit organizations.

The term "subcontract" means any agreement (other than one involving an employer-employee relationship) entered into by a Federal Government prime contractor or subcontractor calling for supplies or services required for the performance of the original contract or subcontract. This includes, but is not limited to, agreements/purchase orders for supplies and services such as equipment purchase, copying services, and travel services.

The offeror understands that:

- a. No contract will be awarded unless and until an acceptable plan is negotiated with the Contracting Officer. The plan will be incorporated into the contract.
- b. An acceptable plan must, in the determination of the Contracting Officer, provide the maximum practicable opportunity for small business concerns and small business concerns owned and controlled by socially and economically disadvantaged persons to participate in the performance of the contract.
- c. If a subcontracting plan acceptable to the Contracting Officer is not negotiated within the time limits prescribed by the contracting activity and such failure arises out of causes within the control and with the fault or negligence of the offeror, the offeror shall be ineligible for award. The Contracting Officer shall notify the Contractor in writing of the reasons for determining a subcontracting plan unacceptable early enough in the negotiation process to allow the Contractor to modify the plan within the time limits prescribed.
- d. Prior compliance of the offeror with other such subcontracting plans under previous contracts will be considered by the Contracting Officer in determining the responsibility of the offeror for award of the contract.
- e. It is the offeror's responsibility to develop a satisfactory subcontracting plan with respect to small business concerns and small business concerns owned and controlled by socially and economically disadvantaged individuals, and women-owned small business concerns, and that each such aspect of the offeror's plan will be judged independent of the other.
- f. The offeror will submit, as required by the Contracting Officer, subcontracting reports in accordance with the instructions thereon, and as further directed by the Contracting Officer. Subcontractors will also submit these reports to the Government's Contracting Officer or as otherwise directed, with a copy to the prime Contractor's designated small and disadvantaged business liaison.
- g. For this particular acquisition, the AHRQ recommended goal (as a percentage of total contract value for the base period) is **23% for Small Businesses**, which shall include at least **5%** (as a percentage of total contract value for the base period) for **Small Disadvantaged Businesses**, at least **5%** (as a percentage of total contract value for the base period) for **Women-Owned Small Businesses**, and at least **2%** (as a percentage of total contract value for the base period) for **HUBZone Small Businesses** and at least **3%** (as a percentage of total contract value for the base period) for **Veteran-Owned Small Businesses**.

These goals represent AHRQ's expectation of the minimum level for subcontracting with small business at the prime contract level. Any goal stated less than the AHRQ recommended goal shall be justified and is subject to negotiation.

C. Other Administrative Data

- (1) Terms and Conditions: The proposal shall stipulate that it is predicated upon the terms and conditions of the RFP. In addition, it shall contain a statement to the effect that it is firm for a period of at least 120 days from the date of receipt thereof by the Government.

Minimum Bid Acceptance Period (April 1984)

- (a) "Acceptance period," as used in this provision, means the number of calendar days available to the Government for awarding a contract from the date specified in this solicitation for receipt of bids.
- (b) This provision supersedes any language pertaining to the acceptance period that may appear elsewhere in this solicitation.
- (c) The Government requires a minimum acceptance period of 120 days.
- (d) A bid allowing less than the Government's minimum acceptance period may be rejected.
- (e) The bidder agrees to execute all that it has undertaken to do, in compliance with its bid, if that bid is accepted in writing within (i) the acceptance period stated in paragraph (3) above, or (ii) any longer acceptance period stated in paragraph (4) above.
- (2) Authority to Conduct Negotiations: The proposal shall list the names and telephone numbers of persons authorized to conduct negotiations and to execute contracts.
- (3) Property:
- (a) It is DHHS policy that contractors will provide all equipment and facilities necessary for performance of contracts. Exception may be granted to furnish Government-owned property, or to authorize purchase with contract funds, only when approved by the contracting officer. If additional equipment must be acquired, you shall include the description, estimated cost of each item and whether you will furnish such items with your own funds.

- (b) You shall identify Government-owned property in your possession and/or property acquired from Federal funds to which you have title, that is proposed to be used in the performance of the prospective contract.
 - (c) The management and control of any Government property shall be in accordance with HHS Publication (OS) 74-115 entitled, Contractor's Guide for Control of Government Property 1990, a copy of which will be provided upon request.
- (4) Royalties: You shall furnish information concerning royalties which are anticipated to be paid in connection with the performance of work under the proposed contract.
 - (5) Commitments: You shall list other commitments with the Government relating to the specified work or services and indicate whether these commitments will or will not interfere with the completion of work and/or services contemplated under this proposal.
 - (6) Financial Capacity: You shall provide sufficient data to indicate that you have the necessary financial capacity, working capital, and other resources to perform the contract without assistance from any outside source. If not, indicate the amount required and the anticipated source. (Financial data such as balance sheets, profit and loss statements, cash forecasts, and financial histories of your organization's affiliated concerns should be utilized.)
 - (7) Performance Capability: You shall provide acceptable evidence of your "ability to obtain" equipment, facilities, and personnel necessary to perform the requirements of this project. If these are not represented in your current operations, they should normally be supported by commitment or explicit arrangement, which is in existence at the time the contract is to be awarded, for the rental, purchase, or other acquisition of such resources, equipment, facilities, or personnel. In addition, you shall indicate your ability to comply with the required or proposed delivery or performance schedule taking into consideration all existing business commitments, commercial as well as Government.
 - (8) Representations and Certifications: Section K, "Representations and Certifications and Other Statements of Offerors" shall be completed and signed by an official authorized to bind your organization. **This section shall be made a part of the original business proposal**

L.12 SELECTION OF OFFERORS

- a. The acceptability of the technical portion of each contract proposal will be evaluated by the technical review committee. The committee will evaluate each proposal in strict conformity with the evaluation criteria of the RFP, utilizing point scores and written critiques. The committee may suggest that the Contracting Officer request clarifying information from an offeror.
- b. The business portion of each contract proposal will be subjected to a limited cost review, management analysis, small business plan analysis, etc.
- c. Past performance and the Small Disadvantaged Business Participation Plan of the technically acceptable offerors will be evaluated by AHRQ staff. The Contracting Officer will determine which proposals to include in the competitive range. Oral or written discussions will be conducted with all offerors in the competitive range, if necessary. All aspects of the proposals are subject to discussions, including cost, technical approach, past performance, Small Disadvantaged Business Participation Plan, Small Business Subcontracting Plan and contractual terms and conditions. Final Proposal Revisions will be requested with the reservation of the right to conduct limited negotiations after submission of the Final Proposal Revisions.
- d. A final best-buy analysis will be performed taking into consideration the results of the technical evaluation, cost analysis, past performance, small disadvantaged business utilization plan, the Small Business Subcontracting Plan, and ability to complete the work within the Government's required schedule. The Government reserves the right to make an award to the best advantage of the Government, technical merit, cost, past performance, and other factors considered.
- e. The Government reserves the right to make a single award, multiple awards, or no award at all to the RFP.

REVISED: APRIL 15, 2002

SECTION M - EVALUATION FACTORS FOR AWARD

- M.1** Selection of an offeror for contract award will be based on an evaluation of proposals against four factors and award will be made to that responsible offeror whose proposal is most advantageous to the Government. The four factors are: technical, cost, past performance, and the Small Disadvantaged Business (SDB) participation plan. The technical proposal will receive paramount consideration in the selection of the Contractor(s) for this acquisition. Offerors that submit technically acceptable proposals will then be evaluated for past performance and for their SDB Participation Plan. Following the evaluation of the offeror's past performance and SDB Participation Plan, a competitive range will be determined.
- M.2** All evaluation factors, other than cost or price, when combined are significantly more important than cost or price. However, cost/price may become a critical factor in source selection in the event that two or more offerors are determined to be essentially equal following the evaluation of all factors other than cost or price. In any event, the Government reserves the right to make an award to that offeror whose proposal provides the best overall value to the Government. The Government reserves the right to make a single award, multiple awards, or no award at all.

THE GOVERNMENT RESERVES THE RIGHT TO MAKE AN AWARD WITHOUT DISCUSSION

- M.3** All proposals will be reviewed in accordance with the governing regulations and AHRQ policies and procedures. The technical proposal, past performance information and SDB Participation Plan will be evaluated in terms of the offeror's responses to each of the evaluation factors. Each proposal will be evaluated on the likelihood of meeting the Government's requirements. The evaluation factors and assigned weights which will be used in the overall review of the offeror's proposal are outlined below. The technical proposal shall consist of the responses to evaluation criteria 1 through 3. The offeror should show that the objectives stated in the proposal are understood and offer a logical program for their achievement. The following criteria will be used to evaluate proposals and will be weighted as indicated in establishing a numerical rating for all proposals submitted. Factors facilitating the evaluation of each criteria below are referenced in the corresponding criteria found in Section L of this solicitation:

OFFERORS PLEASE NOTE: Evaluation Criteria 1 through 3, for a total of 100 points, will be evaluated by a technical peer review committee, who will also recommend technical acceptability or unacceptability of the proposal. AHRQ program staff and contracting staff will review and evaluate Criteria 4 and 5, for a total of 25 points. The total possible points for Evaluation Criteria 1 through 5 is 125 points.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

WEIGHT

1. Technical Approach

15 points

Proposals will be evaluated on completeness, with specific attention to the following:

- Understanding of the overall objectives for the EPC Coordinating Center and its role as an extension of AHRQ staff administering the EPC Program;
- Understanding of evidence-based methods for systematic searches of scientific literature;
- Approach to working with, and providing technical assistance to, professional societies, providers, researchers, and others;
- Extent to which the proposal demonstrates a capability to provide continuity of support over the multi-year period of performance required of the EPC Coordinating Center.

2. Key Personnel

40 points

Proposals will be evaluated on the qualifications and experience of the personnel to be assigned to tasks described in the SOW, with particular attention to:

- Qualifications and experience of the proposed Director of the EPC Coordinating Center, senior staff, consultants, and subcontractors;
- Availability of scientific and technical personnel with the breadth and depth of methodological, technical, and clinical expertise and experience required to perform systematic literature searches, evaluation of the quality of scientific literature; working with professional societies, providers, payors, and others; establishing and operating a database; and conference management;
- Overall degree to which Offeror is able to provide the range of professional, technical, management, and other personnel, both in leadership positions and support positions, with required experience and expertise to meet the requirements for work envisioned under this contract.
- Percentage and category(ies) of personnel who are (a) full-time or part-time employees, (b) consultants, or (c) subcontractors.

3. Organizational Experience and Capabilities

45 points

Evaluation will include consideration of extent and relevance of:

- Experience in carrying out work similar in kind and complexity to the work to be performed in the Statement of Work;
- Experience in performing literature searches of scientific literature, and evaluating the quality thereof;
- Experience in providing technical assistance and other support to public and private-sector entities, similar to that envisioned under this contract;

- Experience in innovative and cost effective ways to measure and assess impact of tools such as clinical practice guidelines, medical review criteria, and other performance measures, on clinical practice;
- Procedures to effectively manage multiple and varied tasks that may have competing/overlapping due dates; and
- Availability of adequate facilities and appropriate equipment (e.g., computers, servers, etc.) for accomplishing the entire range of tasks.

4. Past Performance

20 points

Offerors will be evaluated on their past performance.

The offerors' past performance will be evaluated on the basis of the following factors:

- (a) **Quality:** How well the contractor conformed to the performance standard in providing the research services or achieved the stated objective of the contract or grant. Quality will be evaluated by the personnel provided, the level of effort agreed to in the contract statement of work or grant, and quality of final products (e.g., written reports).
- (b) **Timeliness:** How well the contractor adheres to time-tables and delivery schedules in providing the research services or products. Consideration is given to contractor's effort to recommend and/or take corrective actions to keep the contract or grant on schedule.
- (c) **Customer-satisfaction:** Rates the professional and cooperative behavior of the contractor or grantee with the client.
- (d) **Cost control:** Rates the cost-effectiveness of the contractor or grantee in conducting the research.

Assessment of the offeror's past performance will be one means of evaluating the credibility of the offeror's proposal, and relative capability to meet performance requirements.

The completed questionnaires will provide a basis for determining past performance evaluation as well as information obtained from the references listed in the proposal, other customers known to the Government, consumer protection organizations, and others who may have useful and relevant information. Information will also be considered regarding any significant subcontractors and key personnel records. Past performance will be scored on a range from 0 to 20, with 20 being the most favorable.

Evaluation of past performance will often be quite subjective based on consideration of all relevant facts and circumstances. It will not be based on absolute standards of acceptable performance. The Government is seeking to determine whether the offeror has consistently demonstrated a commitment to customer satisfaction and timely delivery of quality services at fair and reasonable prices.

The assessment of the offeror's past performance will be used as a means of evaluating the relative capability of the offeror and the other competitors. Thus, an offeror with an exceptional record of past performance may receive a more favorable evaluation than another whose record is acceptable, even though both may have acceptable technical proposals.

By past performance, the Government means the offeror's record of conforming to specifications and to standards of good workmanship; the contractor's record of forecasting and controlling costs; the offeror's adherence to contract schedules, including the administrative aspects of performance; the offeror's reputation for reasonable and cooperative behavior and commitment to customer satisfaction; and generally, the offeror's business-like concern for the interest of the customer.

The Government will consider the number or severity of an offeror's problems, the effectiveness of corrective actions taken, the offeror's overall work record, and the age and relevance of past performance information.

The lack of a performance record may result in an unknown performance risk assessment, which will neither be used to the advantage nor disadvantage of the offeror.

The Government reserves the right to evaluate relevant past performance information not specifically provided by the offeror.

5. Small Disadvantaged Business Participation Plan 5 points

The evaluation will be based on information obtained from the plan provided by the offeror, the realism of the proposal, other relevant information obtained from named SDB concerns, and any information supplied by the offeror concerning problems encountered in SDB participation.

Evaluation of the SDB Participation Plan will be a subjective assessment based on a consideration of all relevant facts and circumstances. It will not be based on absolute standards of acceptable performance. The Government is seeking to determine whether the offeror has demonstrated a commitment to use SDB concerns for the work that it intends to perform as the prime contractor.

The assessment of the offeror's SDB Participation Plan will be used as a means of evaluating the relative capability and commitment of the offeror and the other competitors. Thus, an offeror with an exceptional record of participation with SDB concerns may receive more points and a more favorable evaluation than another whose record is acceptable, even though both may have acceptable technical proposals.

SDB participation will be scored with offerors receiving points from 0 to 5, with 5 being the most favorable.