

**Department of Materials Management
Procurement Unit
MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
45 W. Gude Drive, Suite 3100
Rockville, Maryland 20850**

May 5, 2021

NOTICE TO OFFERORS

**The following are questions and responses regarding
RFP No. 4291.4, Interpretation Services for Deaf /Hard of Hearing Individuals**

Question 1: Are companies from Outside USA can apply for this? (such as India or Canada)

Answer: No, due to billing logistics and services, the companies' main headquarters must be based in the United States.

Question 2: Is it required to come there for meetings?

Answer: There may be times when someone may need to attend a meeting.

Question 3: Can we perform the tasks (related to RFP) outside USA? (from India or Canada)

Answer: No, the tasks need to be completed from within the United States.

Question 4: Can we submit the proposals via email?

Answer: No. Please refer to the RFP, Section 14. Mandatory Submissions paragraph two.

Question 5: Is there a pricing template you would like us to use?

Answer: No, please submit your pricing in the format you bill.

Question 6: The solicitation states, "**The Contractor shall include in their response** to MCPS current profiles for each interpreter consisting of a resume, two work references, **and a criminal background check.**" However, it also states, "**Once the contract is awarded, the contractor is responsible for implementing the background process**" Is it acceptable for us to omit criminal background checks from the proposal as this is a costly and implement them instead after award?

Answer: The criminal background check should not be completed unless you are awarded. It is not necessary to submit any information regarding a background check with your offer or submission.

Question 7: Virtual services are not mentioned in the solicitation other than, “Ability to navigate virtual Interpreting platforms”. Will VRI services be permitted if local interpreters are not available for certain assignments?

Answer: No.

Question 8: How much notice is average for ASL requests?

Answer: We prefer a two weeks’ notice, but the average notice is about a week.

Question 9: Section 3.2 Staffing No.4

“The Contractor shall include in their response to MCPS current profiles for each interpreter consisting of a resume, two work references, and a criminal background check. Each interpreter’s skill level will be screened by the agency. If personnel changes are made at any time during the contract term MCPS must be notified to approve the change before services are provided.”

My agency works with roughly 300 interpreters in Montgomery County. Each request for interpreting services requires us to examine the details of the request such as grade level, student language skills, subject matter, inclusion of any additional disabilities beyond deafness, etc. We have no way of knowing which interpreters will be assigned until we receive the request and it wouldn’t be feasible to present the requested documentation for every interpreter we work with. Instead may we submit our process for qualifying interpreters in response to this RFQ and then present the interpreters info to your team as we make confirmations for specific requests? Your team would be able to review and, if necessary, reject the interpreter assigned and request a replacement.

Answer: Due to the nature of these services, MCPS requires a rigorous multi-step onboarding process for any interpreters that we use.

Question 10: Who is your current provider(s) of ASL onsite services?

Answer: The current vendor can be found at the following link:
http://procurement.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/Home/Award_Record/1716
Under 4291.3 Contract Summary 2020.pdf

Question 11: What are the current ASL onsite interpreting rates for your onsite provider(s)?

Answer: We do not disclose the rates of the current interpreters.

Question 12: How many ASL interpreting hours did you use in 2019?

Answer: See response to question #41

Question 13: Do you require specialty ASL interpreting services for Legal, Tactile, CDI or any other interpreting type?

Answer: Yes, on occasion.

Question 14: What percentage of your interpreting assignments are for last minute needs (less than 2 full business days' notice)?

Answer: About five to ten percent of our assignments are for last minute needs.

Question 15: What is the average length of an interpreting assignment?

Answer: We schedule by the hour, day, week or semester depending on the needs and circumstances.

Question 16: Will this be a multi-vendor award?

Answer: Yes

Question 17: Is it a requirement that the bidder participate in the MAPT cooperative rider?

Answer: You must acknowledge it. This rider is for other agencies and or jurisdictions the opportunity to bridge our RFQ, however they would enter into their own agreement. If you choose not to extend your contract to another jurisdiction, that would be between you and the agency or jurisdiction.

Question 18: Is the interpreter criminal background check required to be submitted with the Bid?

Answer: No. This process should be completed only after awarded.

Question 19: Can you give us a historical list of the needs in terms of volume per year and what is the anticipated volume for this upcoming school year?

Answer: See response to question #41. Each year is different depending on the needs of the students, parents and staff.

Question 20: Who are the current vendors providing services?

Answer: See response to question #10

Question 21: Are your current vendors meeting your needs?

Answer: Yes. This contract had run its full term and was required to be rebid.

Question 22: What is the anticipated award date?

Answer: June 2021

Question 23: How will vendors be notified of award?

Answer: A pre-award notice will be sent once the evaluation and recommendations are complete. If awarded and once the board of education approves, final award notices will be forwarded.

Question 24: Do you anticipate awarding one or multiple vendors?

Answer: See response to question #16

Question 25: What are the current hourly bill rates by the vendor?

Answer: We do not disclose the rates of the current vendors under contract.

Question 26: How many billable hours are in a school day?

Answer: The billable hours vary based on the needs; from 2 to 7 hours.

Question 27: What is the anticipated # of full-time or # of part-time positions?

Answer: There are potential needs for full time and part time positions.

Question 28: How many candidates will you need per discipline?

Answer:

Question 29: Is the vendor expected to have a clinic or local office?

Answer: Local offices are preferred, but not required. Being based in the USA is required.

Question 30: Will assigned candidates have access to therapy materials, supplies, equipment, evaluation kits, and protocols provided by your schools?

Answer: No. PPE kits need to be provided by the agency, but must meet MCPS guidelines. The protocols and standards will be given upon award of the contract.

Question 31: Will assigned candidates have access to computers/ laptops and printers provided by your schools?

Answer: This will be determined by the assignment.

Question 32: Can pricing increase during the term of the contract?

Answer: Price increases must remain fixed for the first year of the contract. Please refer to the RFQ, Section 9.0 for additional details.

Question 33: What is the length of the contract term?

Answer: One year, with the options of 3, 1-year extensions. Please refer to the RFQ Section 8.0 Contract Term.

Question 34: Can the vendor provide services in district provided rooms?

Answer: The majority of the time, the interpreter or transliterator will be working in an MCPS building.

Question 35: Does the vendor need to provide on-site personnel?

Answer: No on-site personnel from the agency is required other than the interpreter or transliterator.

Question 36: Will the district use Teletherapy services?

Answer: No

Question 37: Does the District plan to issue RFPs for other related services?

Answer: No

Question 38: The RFP states a criminal background check is required as a part of the proposal. It would make no sense, financially, for the vendors to pay for background checks for work that is not guaranteed to them. Will MCPS change the requirement to allow background checks to be done after award?

Answer: Please see the response to question #18

Question 39: What is the hourly rate of the current vendors?

Answer: Please see the response to question #25

Question 40: Is this a multiple source award contract?

Answer: Please see the response to question #16

Question 41: Can MCPS provide historical data on the number of hours of services provided over the past year, broken down into these categories?

- All-day educational interpreting services in the classroom
- Number of total hours
- Number of total requests
- Requests longer than 7 hours in duration
- Requests less than 3 hours in duration
- Requests more than 5 business days' notice
- Requests less than 5 business days' notice

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- Evening/Weekend interpreting services (after 5pm or Saturday/Sunday)
 - Number of total hours
 - Number of total requests
 - Requests longer than 7 hours in duration
 - Requests less than 3 hours in duration
 - Requests more than 5 business days' notice
 - Requests less than 5 business days' notice

Answer: This data is from the school year of 2018-2019 since we were present in the schools. Since the current school year of 2020-2021 was affected by the pandemic, the needs greatly decreased.

During the day hours, we had the following number of requests:

Requests that were 7 hours or more - 106

Requests that were between 3 and 6.5 hours - 66

Requests that were less than 3 hours - 43

During the evening or weekend hours, we had the following number of requests:

Requests that were 7 hours or more - 6

Requests that were between 3 and 6.5 hours - 20

Requests that were less than 3 hours - 23

All the other assignments that we had were covered by our MCPS staff interpreters.

Question 42: How many total hours of Cued Speech in the past year?

Answer: During this current school year, we had 25 hours of Cued Speech. All the other assignments that we had were covered by our MCPS staff transliterators.

Question 43: The RFP requires two work references for each interpreter. As an agency with multiple interpreters, we have never been asked to provide references for individual interpreters- since we are guaranteeing that we will vet the interpreters to ensure quality. Will MCPS accept our company references in lieu of interpreter references?

Answer: Yes

Question 44: What is the cost or the average cost of a background check through MCPS?

Answer: This process is done through an approved third-party service that you can contact directly for cost.

Question 45: Is MCPS badging reciprocal with other public schools?

Answer: We do not accept background checks that have been conducted for other school systems, the background check must be completed for MCPS so that we receive the notification of results.

Question 46: Could you please define key personnel? Would this include interpreters and does that mean that MCPS will need to approve all schedule changes including last-minute changes?

Answer: Key personnel is MCPS Deaf/ Hard of Hearing (D/HoH) Office of Interpreting Services (OIS). Yes, this would include interpreters and MCPS OIS will need to approve all schedule changes including last minute changes.

Question 47: Due to the global pandemic and post office issues we would like to request MCPS allow vendors to provide their responses via email

Answer: Unfortunately, we are not able to accommodate this request. All responses must be mailed, couriered, sent via FedEx, UPS or delivered directly. Our offices are open to receive responses Monday -Friday from 7:30am – 3:00pm.

Question 48: Are there Type Well/C-Print needs and will MCPS add that to this SOW?

Answer: There may be future needs for C-Print.

Question 49: Page 5 of the RFP #4291.4 number 12.0 References,

I am using as references MCPS Dept of Deaf and Hearing coordinators and the supervisor since I have only worked for MCPS for the last 29 years. It asks for a “contract number” for each and I don’t have that. Is that for outside of MCPS work reference only? Can I leave that blank?

Answer: If you worked under this RFP in the past, you would indicate 4291.3 as that is the current contract number in place. For additional references outside of MCPS, you would reference the outside contract number.

Question 50: Concerning pricing, I don't see any place to actually fill in a blank for an hourly rate.

Answer: Please submit your pricing for services either in a separate document or you may request a word version of the RFP and you can submit the information there below pricing.

Question 51: Regarding redaction, other than my social security # (tax ID #) on page 14 of the RFP #4291.4 Interpreting Services, and the same info on my W9 is there anything else that needs to be redacted?

Answer: You may redact any information you deem confidential or proprietary.

Question 52: Do I need to provide a resume even though I worked for MCPS for 27 years as a cued speech transliterator before retiring in 2018, and returning as an independent contractor in 2019 and working consistently since then? Also, there is no "offeror" side from me, so there are no "staff employment procedures" as I am the sole provider so I don't know how to answer questions 3.0 Scope of work through 4.0 Contractor responsibilities.

Answer: No, you do not need to provide a resume.

Question 53: Should I write at the top of each page, "I understand and comply" and initial as I did with the previous RFP?

Answer: It is preferred that you indicate "understand and comply" under each section.

Question 54: As for the page numbers, do I understand correctly that I should re-number them so they appear in the order that they are submitted and in the table of contents, and ignore the numbering already on many of the pages?

Answer: In your submission, your table of contents pages should match the pages numbers in your submission.

Question 55: Do you want all FIVE binders and the flash drive submitted in a single manila envelope?

Answer: You may use multiple envelopes to submit your binders.

Question 56: Historically, what has been MCPS's biggest challenge in covering assignments?

Answer: The biggest challenge is when we get last minute cancellations from the vendor without an approved replacement.

Question 57: Section 3.2 Staffing, 1, page 2 states that Certification or state license is not required, but is preferred." Interpreters who are not nationally certified have no obligation to adhere to the RID Code of Professional Conduct (CPC), and agencies hiring them have no recourse if they violate the CPC. Therefore, MCPS will experience more problems with services provided by non-certified interpreters due to lower skill levels, unprofessional, and even unethical behavior, leaving consumers struggling to understand and/or be understood by less qualified interpreters. Requiring only nationally certified interpreters will resolve most concerns in these areas. Will MCPS revise the requirements to state that interpreters must be nationally certified?

Answer: No. The RFP gives the current requirements for interpreters and transliterators.

Question 58: Section 3.2 Staffing, #4 page 2, “The Contractor shall include in their response to MCPS... a criminal background check.” Most interpreters will not take the time and expense to go through additional criminal background checks and fingerprinting, with no guarantee of work. Can MCPS confirm they will allow for criminal background checks of these interpreters after award?

Answer: Please see response to question #18

Question 59: Hand Delivery of proposals- During the COVID 19 pandemic with many people working from home it may be an undo risk to vendors and MCPS personnel who would need to be at the school to receive proposals, and then result in unnecessary cost to ship copies to evaluators. In addition, there has been a large push to reduce carbon footprint wherever possible, and most schools now accept electronic submissions of proposals. With all the required documents and multiple copies from multiple vendors this is in direct conflict with the Government’s policy of minimizing the waste of resources such as trees, and the unnecessary emission of CO2 for vehicles for those delivering the proposals to require hand delivery. In the interest of reducing potential exposure and reducing the county’s carbon footprint, will MCPS accept electronic copy for the submission of a vendor's bid?

Answer: Please see response to question #47

Question 60: Section 6.0 Calendar, page 3, “In the event of weather-related or emergency cancellations and closures only the first 24 hours of interpreting services will be billable and the consecutive days to follow are non-billable.”

Highly qualified and certified interpreters make a commitment and then decline all other work. When an assignment cancels two days prior to the date scheduled, it is extremely difficult to find replacement work, therefore, the industry standard is to pay the originally assigned time to the interpreter for any cancellation with less than 2 full business days’ notice. Will MCPS change this section to state that all cancellations provided to the vendor with less than 2 full business days’ notice will be billable?

Answer: No

Question 61: Section 6.0 Calendar, page 3, states, “Generally, jobs requiring 2 hours or more will be assigned a team of 2 interpreters”.

This time-frame is an outdated industry standard. Due to injuries to interpreters from Repetitive Stress Injuries (RSI) the standard is now to provide two interpreters for any assignment requiring consistent interpreting for 1.5 hours or more. Will MCPS revise this statement to say, “Generally, jobs requiring 1.5 hours or more of consistent interpreting will be assigned a team of two interpreters. However, depending on the intensity of the job requirement, MCPS OIS has the discretion to change this requirement.”?

Answer: No

Question 62: Section 7.0 B Transportation/Mileage states that Tolls, parking, metro fares, or any variations of taxis will not be reimbursed.

We are surprised to see the county eliminate metro as an option since metro, when it works for the location, allows everyone to reduce their carbon footprint. Not allowing for reimbursement of metro

encourages more people to drive to the assignment, adding to the local traffic issues and increasing pollution. Will MCPS change this to allow for metro up to a reasonable cap per assignment?

Answer: Most schools are not easily accessible on foot from Metro so no reimbursement will be provided.

Question 63: Section 9.0 Provision for Price Adjustment

Allows MCPS to reduce vendors rates without request from the vendor. Vendors set rates based on pay to the interpreters and cannot risk having a client reduce the rate of pay, since pay to the interpreters does not decrease. Can MCPS please remove the ability to decrease vendors rates or clarify that vendors would have to agree to the reduction?

Answer: Historically, there has not been a circumstance where the rates were reduced they only remained the same. Should this circumstance arise, it would be discussed with the vendor.

Question 64: Section 15. Treatment of Technical Data in Proposal provides for labeling proprietary information for its protection, then states that MCPS has the right to use or disclose the information so labeled. Can MCPS please clarify what vendors would need to do (beyond complying with section 16) to fully protect proprietary information from disclosure if it is submitted with an offer?

Answer: MCPS will protect the disclosure of any proprietary information allowed under the law. Any documentation provided under the submission will be used to for evaluation purposes only. Should MCPS receive a public information request, only information required to be disclosed and not redacted will be provided.

Question 65: Section 21.0 Contractor Obligations, page 10, part II, “Required Criminal Background check process for certain individuals in the contractor’s workforce.”

- Interpreters who work with the federal government have extensive background investigations, including fingerprinting, criminal records check, credit checks and more. Will MCPS accept the federal government ID badge (which is only provided after passing this suitability process) as evidence of the criminal background checks?
- What is the cost of the criminal background check when done through the school system?
- Since this cost is impossible to predict, as vendors do not know how many interpreters would be needed to fulfill MCPS requests, this unknown factor would result in vendors having to increase rates enough to be sure they are covered—and most likely end up resulting in unnecessary cost to MCPS. Will MCPS remove the requirement for the vendors to pay for these background checks?

Answer: MCPS will only accept background checks that have been conducted on our behalf, we do not accept checks from other agencies or jurisdictions. The cost can be obtained by contacting the approved third-party administrator allowed to conduct the check on our behalf. MCPS will not assume the cost of the checks.

Question 66: Section 1.0 Intent, page 1, states that “MCPS reserves the right to add Contractors throughout the contract term should MCPS determine in its sole discretion that there be a need for additional services not available from the awarded contractors.”

It appears that the solicitation anticipates multiple awards. Since splitting the work lessens the volume of work for winning vendors, thus not allowing vendors to offer volume pricing, will MCPS choose one primary vendor and two alternate vendors and allow each vendor to offer their most competitive rates (based on volume) if selected as primary?

Answer: Correct, it is anticipated that this will be awarded to multiple vendors. There will be no tiered award.

Question 67: Section 4.0 Contractor Responsibilities, #6, page 3, states “All interpreters are to arrive at least 15 minutes prior to an event. If an interpreter does not arrive by the starting time of the event, the Contractor will be charged a penalty of \$25.00. This penalty will be deducted from the invoice.”

The standard for contracting is to reduce pay to the vendor by the amount of time the interpreter is late, and if there are repeated, avoidable lateness, to include this information in the vendor's performance documentation. For those vendors who might respond, this punitive measure would create a disincentive. Will MCPS remove the penalty of \$25.00 and change this to state that when interpreters are late, the vendor will only be paid for the actual time services are rendered?

Answer: See Section 4.0

Question 68: Article 21 B 4 mentions a training that is required for all interpreters who will work on the contract.

- Can MCPS clarify how long it takes to complete this training?
- Can MCPS clarify how the time for the training is invoiced?

Answer: This is an online training that would be accessible via the MCPS webpage. It should take no longer than 30 minutes. The process is not able to be invoiced back to MCPS, this is part of the contractor’s obligation if awarded.

Question 69: ARTICLE 23.A, 1. INSURANCE \$3,000,000 annual aggregate.

With dozens of federal government and commercial contracts, some valued in the millions, we have never been required to provide more than \$2,000,000 aggregate insurance coverage. We have been advised by our insurance provider that we most likely could not get this much coverage in one policy as it is considered too much for our type of business—and thus raise suspicions for the insurance provider. Increasing to meet the requirement of \$3,000,000 would be very costly and force vendors to charge significantly more to cover this cost. Will MCPS accept the standard, industry appropriate \$2,000,000 aggregate?

Answer: Yes, we will reduce it to \$2,000,000.

Question 70: COVID Impact: Can MCPS provide a brief synopsis of how COVID has impacted the work under this contract?

- Have the hours been reduced significantly?
- Are services being provided via video?
- Are there other impacts from the changes made in response to COVID?

Answer: During Covid19, the hours were reduced significantly. We see this reduction as temporary.

Question 71: How many resumes would the County like to see in the response?

Answer: There is no specific number.

Question 72: Is the county willing to pay parking/tolls on as-needed basis provided we show receipts?

Answer: No

Question 73: Is the county interested in using Video Remote Interpreting for any interpreting requirements? The service is on-demand, cost effective, and flexible.

Answer: No

Question 74: Would he County like a point-by-point response to or form of acknowledgement of General Contract Articles, along with the RFP? Or should we respond to the Contract Articles document at our discretion?

Answer: No. If there are exceptions to the contracting articles, they should be listed separately. Not point by point. Only the RFP should be responded to point by point. Please note that there are several articles indicated as non-negotiable.

Question 75: What is the hourly rate with a 2-hour minimum?

Answer: This information should be provided by the vendor to MCPS. MCPS will not discuss rates from various vendors.

Question 76: Emergency Rate for assignments less than 24 hours? Additional \$10/hr.

Answer: No

Questions 77: Prep time for Musical/Concerts programs, Plays performances, Graduations?

Answer: This will be determined by a case-by-case basis.

Question 78: When does the contact start and end?

Answer: The contract will be effective the first day after board approval. And will end one year later unless extended for an additional year. This extension process occurs annually for up to 3, 1-year periods with a total potential term of 4 years.

Question 79: Will there be any Hybrid classes for students?

Answer: No


Question 80: Tiered requests system for vendors?

Answer: No.

Please indicate your receipt of this notice by signing below and returning with your proposal or under a separate cover.

Accepted By: _____
(Name & Title)

Name of Company: _____


Angela McIntosh-Davis, CPPB, Team Leader
Procurement Unit