

RFX in Procurement: From the Request to a Competition-Driven Award

RFX is an umbrella term for structured request processes within the procurement process, such as Request for Information (RFI), Request for Quotation (RFQ) and Request for Proposal (RFP). Using RFX documents, buyers systematically request quotations, information or solution concepts from suppliers, thereby creating a comparable and traceable basis for decision-making. RFX is thus a central instrument of negotiation management and supplier selection in DACH industry.

Key facts

- RFX typically comprises RFI, RFQ and RFP as standardised request processes with varying levels of depth.
- RFQ is suitable for comparable products and services, RFP for complex solutions, and RFI for a market overview.
- A clear specification and uniform acceptance criteria are prerequisites for comparable quotations.
- RFX processes increase transparency, traceability and legal certainty in supplier selection.
- In practice, modern RFX procedures are frequently conducted digitally, integrated into ERP or eSourcing systems.
- The follow-up with lessons learned and supplier rating secures the quality of future processes.

Definition: RFX in procurement

RFX serves as an umbrella term for various types of requests to the supplier market, with the X acting as a placeholder for the respective type of request. The aim is to obtain quotations under identical conditions and to be able to evaluate them objectively.

RFI, RFQ and RFP at a glance

The Request for Information (RFI) serves to explore the market: suppliers provide information on capabilities, technologies or price ranges without any concrete order being imminent. The Request for Quotation (RFQ) is the classic quotation request for clearly specified products or services, focusing on price, delivery date and terms. The Request for Proposal (RFP) requests solution proposals when the specification is still open and the bidder is expected to contribute their expertise – typical for engineering services, system deliveries or plant and service orders.

Further RFX variants

Depending on the use case, further formats complement the spectrum: the Request for Tender (RFT) corresponds to the formal tender, for example in public procurement under procurement directives. The Request for Concept (RFC) or Request for Cost/Estimate (RFE) is used in early project phases. In practice, companies are often guided by an internal set of rules that defines which procedure is to be applied above which procurement volume.

Methods and approach of an RFX process

An effective RFX process follows a defined sequence from requirement clarification to contract award. Structure and documentation are just as important as the substantive content of the request.

Preparation and specification

The starting point is the precise definition of the requirement: technical specification, drawings, bills of materials, bill of quantities, desired delivery terms (such as EXW or other Incoterms) and legal framework conditions. For categories such as tool procurement, arrangements regarding tool deposits or tool ownership must also be clarified at an early stage. Equally important are uniform acceptance criteria so that all bidders are evaluated against the same standard.

Supplier identification and dispatch of the request

Based on supplier master data, supplier approval processes and the supplier rating from past deliveries – for example regarding incoming goods quality – the bidder pool is defined. Companies typically invite three to five qualified bidders in order to establish genuine comparability and competition. The request contains structured response forms so that the responses are comparable mechanically or in tabular form.

Evaluation, award and follow-up

Quotations are evaluated according to criteria defined in advance, frequently using a weighted scoring scheme covering price, quality, delivery performance and service. Following the award, documentation, contract conclusion – for services often in the form of a service contract – as well as the evaluation with lessons learned belong to a proper completion. The insights feed into future requests and the further developed procurement directives.

Key KPIs for steering RFX processes

RFX processes can be managed and continuously improved using measurable KPIs. The goal is high process efficiency combined with fruitful procurement.

Efficiency and process KPIs

Typical KPIs are the processing time from request to completion, the quotation rate (proportion of bidders responding on time) and the proportion of processes handled fully digitally. In practice, well-organised RFQ cycles frequently range from a few days for standard parts to several weeks for complex RFPs.

Result KPIs

On the results side, the costs saved compared with reference prices or initial quotations, the number of qualified quotations per process and the accuracy of planning matter – for example, how well the quoted delivery times could be integrated into supply planning. Supplier KPIs, such as the result in the supplier rating of the new source, also provide insight into the quality of the selection.

Risks and controls in the RFX process

RFX processes are only as good as their preparation and their control. Unclear specifications, inadequate documentation or a bidder pool that is too narrow frequently lead to delays and

re-negotiations.

Typical risks

Common weak points are incomplete or ambiguous specifications, which produce deviating quotations, as well as missing acceptance criteria, which make the evaluation subjective. For payment details such as down payments or instalment payments, a clear arrangement in the request and contract documentation set is required. Unclear notice periods in framework agreements or the failure to consider complaint processes in the event of defects can also become costly later on.

Controls and compliance

Effective controls include four-eyes principles for award decisions, documented evaluation matrices and compliance with internal procurement directives. Master data must be properly maintained, starting with the creation of creditor master records through to the approval of new suppliers. The subsequent goods receipt inspection planning ensures that the quality requirements agreed in the RFX are also checked operationally.

Current developments: digitalisation and sustainability in RFX

RFX processes are changing significantly due to digitalisation and increased sustainability requirements. Buyers use data-driven tools and expand the evaluation criteria beyond price and delivery time.

Digital requests and data integration

Modern procurement platforms and AI-supported tools support the creation of requests, supplier sourcing and quotation comparison. For reporting, RFX data flows via a procurement ETL process into analytics environments, where it can be linked with inventory KPIs such as average inventory. This turns the request from an isolated transaction into a data-driven steering instrument.

Sustainability as an evaluation criterion

A growing number of companies request supply chain decarbonisation and the Supply Chain Carbon Footprint (SCF) of bidders in the RFX, for example emissions data, energy sources or measures to reduce packaging. Sustainability requirements are weighted in the same way as classic criteria and feed into the award decision. Approaches such as Design-to-Value are also used in RFP processes to jointly develop cost- and resource-optimised solutions with bidders.

Typical metrics

RFQ processing time: 5–15 working days

typical benchmark for standard parts; complex RFPs often take several weeks

Quotation rate: typically > 80%

proportion of on-time, complete responses from an invited bidder pool

Qualified quotations per process: frequently 3–5

ensures genuine comparability and competition

Cost saving versus reference: in practice often 3–10%

highly dependent on category, market and process quality; to be assessed as a benchmark

Practical example

A mid-sized mechanical engineering company previously handled individual requests by email and lost time due to clarifying queries and non-comparable quotations. The company introduced a standardised RFQ template with uniform technical annexes, defined acceptance criteria and a weighted evaluation scheme. For complex manufacturing orders, it added an RFP stage in which bidders submit manufacturing concepts and reference evidence. After six months, lead times had been significantly reduced and the comparability of quotations improved noticeably.

- Standardised request template with uniform specifications and response forms
- Defined bidder pool based on supplier approval and the previous supplier rating
- Weighted evaluation scheme covering price, quality, delivery performance and sustainability
- Feedback to unsuccessful bidders and a lessons-learned round for each process

Conclusion

RFX is the backbone of structured, competition-driven procurement. Those who standardise requests, define criteria transparently and document processes properly achieve better prices, lower risks and faster decisions. The choice of the right process – RFI, RFQ or RFP – depends on the complexity and specification maturity of the requirement. Digitalisation and sustainability criteria significantly extend the classic RFX process. What ultimately matters is consistent follow-up, so that each process generates improvements for the next.

Frequently asked questions

What does RFX mean in procurement?

RFX is an umbrella term for structured request processes directed at suppliers. These include the Request for Information (RFI), the Request for Quotation (RFQ) and the Request for Proposal (RFP). The X serves as a placeholder for the respective type of request.

What is the difference between RFQ and RFP?

An RFQ requests quotations for clearly specified products or services, with price and terms at the forefront. An RFP requests solution concepts when the requirement has not yet been fully specified and bidders are expected to contribute their expertise. In practice, complex procurement often starts with an RFP and culminates in an RFQ for the actual award.

When should you conduct an RFI?

An RFI is suitable for early phases, for example when dealing with new procurement categories, new technologies or prior to supplier selection. It provides a structured market overview without already requesting binding quotations. The results typically feed into the subsequent RFQ or RFP.

How many suppliers should you include in a request?

In practice, companies frequently invite three to five qualified bidders. Too few bidders reduce competition, while too many make evaluation more difficult and lower the response rate. The bidder pool should be based on data such as supplier approval, incoming goods quality and the previous supplier rating.

How do you create a professional RFQ?

A professional RFQ contains a precise technical specification, a bill of quantities, delivery terms (e.g. EXW), deadlines, legal framework conditions and standardised response forms. Defined acceptance criteria and a transparent evaluation logic are essential. Standardised templates reduce clarifying queries and make quotations comparable.

What are the benefits of a structured RFX process?

A structured RFX process creates competition, improves the comparability of quotations and increases the traceability of the award decision. It reduces the risk of re-negotiations and supply problems, as requirements are clearly defined at an early stage. It also provides data for KPIs and for the continuous improvement of procurement.