

**WAC 468-600-360 Commission's authority to elect competitive negotiations.** (1) In addition to the commission's ability to exercise any alternative process permitted under WAC 468-600-232, the commission may authorize, at its option, competitive negotiations with more than a single proposer as a means of selecting from among competing proposals submitted under these rules.

Negotiations under this section are part of the proposal evaluation process and do not constitute the negotiation of a project agreement.

(2) The commission may announce its election to conduct competitive negotiations:

(a) In any notice issued for solicited proposals under WAC 468-600-105; or

(b) By written notice, by mail or by electronic means, to the proposers, issued at any time following the state's receipt of proposals under WAC 468-600-220.

(3) In any communication under subsection (2) of this section, or by notice to the proposers issued by mail or by electronic means at any time after the receipt of proposals, the commission may announce that it will initiate competitive negotiations with all proposers who submitted responsive proposals, or only with proposers who qualify to negotiate because the state has determined that their proposals fall within a competitive range.

(4) When the commission elects to negotiate only with proposers within a competitive range, then after the evaluation panel's evaluation of proposals in accordance with the criteria set forth in the notice or request for proposals, the commission will determine the proposers in the competitive range.

(a) For purposes of this subsection (4), the proposers in the competitive range consist of those proposers whose proposals, as determined by the commission in its discretion, have a reasonable chance of being determined the best proposal as the result of the evaluations conducted by the evaluation panel under WAC 468-600-350. In determining which proposals fall within the competitive range, the commission may consider whether its preliminary evaluation of proposals establishes a natural break in the preliminary scores of the proposals that suggests those proposals that are sufficiently competitive to be included in the competitive range.

(b) The department will provide written notice to all proposers, by mail or by electronic means, of the proposals the commission determines to fall within the competitive range. A proposer whose proposal is not within the competitive range may submit a written protest of the commission's evaluation and determination of the competitive range within fourteen calendar days after the date of the department's notice. A proposer's written protest must state facts and argument that demonstrate how the competitive range determination was flawed or how the commission's determination constituted an abuse of discretion. If the department receives no written protest concerning the proposed selection listing within the fourteen calendar day period, then the department will proceed with negotiations with the proposers whose proposals fell within the competitive range.

(c) In response to a timely filed protest, the commission will issue a written decision that resolves the issues raised in the protest. The commission will make its written determination available, by mail or by electronic means, to the protesting proposer and to the proposers falling within the competitive range.

(5) The object of competitive negotiations, which the department may conduct concurrently with more than one proposer or serially, is to maximize the state's ability to obtain best value and to permit proposers to develop revised proposals. Therefore, the negotiations may include, but shall not be limited to:

(a) Informing proposers of deficiencies in their proposals;

(b) Notifying proposers of parts of their proposals for which the department would like additional information; and

(c) Otherwise allowing proposers to develop revised proposals that will permit the state to obtain the best proposal based on the requirements and evaluation criteria set forth in the notice or request for proposals.

(6) The scope, manner and extent of negotiations with any proposer are subject to the discretion of the department. To prevent the disclosure of proposal information to a proposer's competitors, the department shall conduct negotiations with proposers before the nature of the proposals, information about the proposed project, or proposal information have been made public under WAC 468-600-600. In conducting negotiations, the department:

(a) Shall treat all proposers fairly and shall not engage in conduct that favors any proposer over another;

(b) Shall not reveal to another proposer a proposer's unique technology, unique or innovative approaches to project design, management or financing, or any information that would compromise the proposer's intellectual property, trade secrets or sensitive business information; or

(c) Shall not reveal to another proposer a proposer's price or pricing information, provided, however, that the department may inform a proposer that the department considers a proposer's price or pricing information to be too high or too low.

(7) The evaluation panel must further evaluate the proposals subjected to the competitive negotiation process, and recommendations to the commission for their action under WAC 468-600-355.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 47.29.030. WSR 07-04-095, § 468-600-360, filed 2/6/07, effective 3/9/07.]