

# **VENDOR GUIDE: HOW TO DO BUSINESS WITH THE COUNTY OF EL PASO, TEXAS**

Thank you for your interest in doing business with the County of El Paso. We hope this guide will benefit new or current suppliers. Our goal is to help vendors promote a good business relationship with the County and obtain services and supplies that translate to smart use of taxpayer dollars.

This Vendor Guide outlines the County's purchasing policies and procedures as set in the Purchasing Department's Purchasing Policy and Procedures. Please contact our department with any questions related to the purchasing process.

## **Our Mission**

The Purchasing Department is dedicated to procuring quality materials and services that meet the County's specifications and requirement at reasonable, competitive prices, within the requirements of law.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this guide is to explain how a vendor may participate in the process to obtain the County's business for the purchase of supplies and services. The County is always interested in securing responsible vendors who can meet its supply needs promptly and economically.

## **Organization**

The County of El Paso Purchasing Department operates under applicable Texas Local Government Codes and statutes. The Purchasing Agent is the only authorized procurement authority and all purchases must be approved and coordinated through the Purchasing Agent. Additionally, any purchases greater than \$50,000 require additional approval from the County Commissioners Court.

Each County department is responsible for ensuring that no purchases are made outside of the Purchasing Department. Each vendor doing business or desiring to do business with the County is responsible for ensuring that all contact and coordination begins with the Purchasing Department.

The County of El Paso and the Purchasing Department takes its ethical responsibility very seriously. Vendors are prohibited from working outside of the Purchasing Department's procedures to obtain County business.

## **Sales Calls & Contacts**

Office hours are 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday. We know the time of each vendor is valuable, so to ensure that vendors receive adequate attention, we strongly recommend vendors coordinate with purchasing staff to set appointments, especially if the presence of a county department is requested.

Routine "courtesy" visits are permitted to the Purchasing Department, but vendors need to remain aware that there may not be availability for a meeting. Vendors are shall not visit County Departments other than Purchasing for sales calls or demos. The Purchasing Department will coordinate all vendor new product demonstrations and ensure the appropriate departments are available.

## **Vendor Registration**

Vendors wishing to participate in the formal bidding process (items/services greater than \$50,000) are strongly encouraged to register with our electronic bid notification system.

To register, click on the following link: <http://www.epcounty.com/vendorenrollment/default.htm>.

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Once the vendor information has been entered, the Purchasing Department will review the application and send an email containing login information, which can then be used to access the secured online electronic website, where vendors can manage their profiles.

Supplies and Services less than \$50,000 are handled by the Buyer Division. Because of the large number of suppliers with whom this division interacts, and the requirements surrounding the quotation process, vendors are not guaranteed contact for each small dollar quote obtained.

Failure to respond to three (3) consecutive formal solicitations or quotes may result in the removal of your firm's name from the supplier list.

## Bidding Process Specifications and Basis for Award

### QUOTATIONS (Informal Bids; <\$50,000)

In most instances, written specifications are used in the bidding process to describe the required level of quality, quantity, delivery, and scope of work. In addition to the specifications, certain terms and conditions governing purchases are also outlined in the quotation form. Given certain factors, the award will go to the lowest responsible bidder that meets all requirements as listed in the documentation provided. Factors such as delivery time, quality, compatibility, references, experience, parts and services, freight cost, payment terms, etc., play an important role in awarding a purchase order to the "lowest responsible bidder." A "responsive" quote is one which is in substantial conformance with the requirements of the specifications and the County's contractual terms and conditions.

### FORMAL SOLICITATIONS (Bids, Proposals, Qualifications; >\$50,000)

Written, formal specifications are required, along with advertised relevant information and a preset bid opening place/time. Specifications will describe the required level of quality, quantity, delivery, scope of work and required deliverables. County terms and conditions apply and failure to acknowledge acceptance may result in non-award. In formal solicitations, as in informal bids, factors such as delivery time, quality, compatibility, references, experience, parts and services, freight cost, payment terms, etc., play an important role in awarding a purchase order to the "lowest responsible bidder." A "responsive" bid is one which is in substantial conformance with the requirements of the specifications, the invitation to bid, and the County's contractual terms and conditions. This would also include such things as completeness of any forms, inclusion of references and attachments, and completion of required responses.

Per local government codes, sealed bids will be awarded based on lowest, responsive and responsible bid meeting all requirements as listed in the solicitation documentation provided. Proposals are awarded based on a combination of listed evaluative criteria, of which price may only be part of the overall consideration. Qualifications-based awards, by law, cannot have price as an award consideration.

Specifications prepared by County departments are carefully reviewed by County staff to eliminate undue restrictions and other limitations which unnecessarily reduce competition. Participation does not guarantee an award or resulting purchase.

Vendors may also expend considerable time and money presenting a product demonstration, bid, or quote to the County in hopes of making a sale. **No vendor is guaranteed County business and the County is not responsible to reimburse any costs associated with preparation of bids or quotation or product demonstrations.**

Vendors are advised that any assistance provided to a County department in developing specifications or requirements will disqualify the providing vendor from participating in the solicitation or quotation process. It is recommended that any vendor wishing to provide expensive pre-purchase services or assistance with specifications consider contracting separately with the department for this service, under the understanding that they will not participate in the competitive bid or quotation.

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## Delivery and Inspections

Shipment in almost all cases is to be made to the County of El Paso, FOB (Free On Board) destination. Requirements for delivery are specified on all bids and purchase orders. Failure to meet the specified delivery date may negatively impact a vendor's ability to obtain future business.

## Bid Opening and Results

On purchases greater than \$50,000, participating vendors are required to seal their bids or proposals in sealed, marked envelopes. All formal solicitations are opened at the advertised time and publicly read aloud. Bid tabulations are posted on the County Purchasing web page.

Solicitation award information is also available by contacting the Purchasing Department in writing (email or letter) and requesting a copy of the tabulations. Note that it may take time to compile all the results of a solicitation, so vendors are requested to allow at least 48 hours before requesting a copy of the tabulation. The Formal Bid division will respond via email to all requests for documentation either with a link to the posted information or an attached copy of the tabulation. All solicitation results are a matter of public record in accordance with applicable laws.

Vendor submittals may be disqualified if instructions in the bid packet are not followed. Vendors are advised to read all requirements carefully and ensure that required documents are returned as specified and that bids or proposals are prepared based on the specifications and County requirements.

## Change Orders

Any change to an existing contract must be in writing and authorized by the contracting department, the County Attorney's Office, the County Administration or Commissioners Court, depending on the type of change and the dollar amount of the change order, if applicable.

## Billing and Payment

The County requires correct invoices to process payment on any purchase order or contract. The purchase order or contract number must appear on all invoices, shipping tags, and all correspondence relevant to the order.

Payment is made after receipt of correct invoices and verified delivery and acceptance of material/service, as specified on the purchase order or contract documents. Unless otherwise instructed, invoices should be submitted to the County of El Paso **GL and Disbursement Division**, 320 S. Campbell Street, Room 140 Paso, Texas 79901.

Email inquiries regarding payment or invoices may be sent [AuditorsAPIInvoices@epcounty.com](mailto:AuditorsAPIInvoices@epcounty.com). Sending your invoice to any other location (unless instructed to do so) may delay payment. The County tries to pay all invoices within thirty (30) days of receipt of a correct invoice tied to a valid receipt (acceptance of product/service). Questions regarding payment of invoices should be made to the County Auditor. Please have the purchase order or contract number and invoice number available for easy reference.

## Taxes

The County is exempt from federal excise tax and State of Texas sales tax, but pays other taxes when applicable.

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## Local Business

The County is very interested in promoting local businesses. Local businesses are an important part of a competitive bid process. The County takes positive steps to maximize the utilization of local business enterprises and has adopted a local preference policy in accordance with authorizations stated in local government code 271.905.

A local business is defined as a business, person, firm or establishment whose principle place of business is located within the County of El Paso. Verification is required, along with valid identification and verification that the purchase and vendor meets the requirements as detailed in the Purchasing Policies and Procedures manual.

It is important to note that this policy is *not intended to override any fiduciary responsibility of the County of El Paso to obtain the best price, quality, and service available for items to be purchased with the taxpayer dollar*. The detailed requirements checklist listed in solicitation documents details the steps and verification required to obtain local preference. **Vendors not meeting the verification thresholds established by policy, or providing adequate proof of statements made in obtaining the consideration, will not be presented to Commissioners Court related to this consideration.**

## Gifts and Gratuities

The County of El Paso's Ethics Policy prohibits County officials from accepting gifts or gratuities, and details the steps by which these offers must be reported. Furthermore, as a matter of additional internal policy, the Purchasing Department staff are prohibited from accepting any gifts or gratuities. To promote an atmosphere of good governance, it is recommended that all vendors actively avoid offering gifts or gratuities when dealing with County staff.

## Insurance

In many instances, the County requires a certificate of insurance verifying coverage per determined minimum insurance requirements when doing business with the County. Whenever insurance is required, the vendor will be supplied with complete requirements for coverage by the bid contact. Please contact Human Resources Department Contracts Manager with any questions related to minimum insurance requirements.

## Acting Without a Purchase Order Number

All purchases are required to have either a purchase order (PO) number or contract number. Vendors are advised to refuse service or filling an order without a valid, signed PO or contract. The County is not responsible for payment to vendors who acted without a valid PO or contract number.

Exception: Although incredibly rare, during an emergency this option may not be available in the stringent response time needed. The employee who placed the order is responsible for verifying with the Purchasing Department that an emergency exists and authorization to purchase is obtained. If this is presented, vendors are required to obtain the individual's full name and department and request identification if the order is placed in person. The vendor is then advised to contact the Purchasing Department immediately, providing the information obtained, to ensure correct steps are in place to facilitate payment.

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## Americans with Disabilities Act

In compliance with the American with Disabilities Act, if you or someone in your firm needs special assistance to participate in a walk-through or attend a pre-bid conference, please contact the Purchasing Department and request the necessary assistance. Notification 48 hours prior to the meeting will enable the County to make reasonable arrangements to ensure accessibility to the meeting. No vendor providing a service, program or activity to the public on behalf of the County shall discriminate against any person because of sex, race, color, creed, national origin, or disability. Vendors, if providing a service, program or activity to the public on behalf of the County, shall comply with the American with Disabilities Act and County's policies pursuant thereto when providing said service, program or activity.

## Other Information

- Purchasing Department website: <http://www.epcounty.com/purchasing/default.htm>
- Any area of the Purchasing Department may be contacted by telephone at (915) 273-3349 during listed business hours:
  - Executive Management
  - Formal Solicitations
  - Buyer/Informal Solicitations
  - Inventory
  - Supply/Print/Mail
- Questions pertaining to any advertised bid may be sent to: [BidQuestions@epcounty.com](mailto:BidQuestions@epcounty.com)
- For payments or invoice questions, the County Auditor's Office may be contacted by telephone at (915) 273-3262 or emailed at [AuditorsAPInvoices@epcounty.com](mailto:AuditorsAPInvoices@epcounty.com)