

Request for Quotation (RFQ) - 36C25719Q1381

Questions and Answers - Amendment – FBO

The following questions were submitted in response to this RFQ.

The Government's "Answers" are provided below:

1. Is there a particular reason why the requirement is for phone interviews and not face-to-face or interviews via Skype? The solicitation is for phone interviews because that is a more secure form of communication than skype. Skype does not meet the FIPS requirements of VA data collection. Additionally, many Veterans who live in rural areas do not have access to high speed internet nor computing capabilities for Skype.
2. Is the to-be-delivered product from the contract limited to only verbatim transcripts of the interviews or is some type of report also desired? Verbatim transcripts, demographic information, military characteristics, and referral information are required. The VA team will work with the contractor regarding the specifics of the information to be collected.
3. If a report is required vice only interview transcripts, is there a specified format for the report and what, if any, analysis and other report findings are required? We will work with the organization to finalize a format for the transcripts, demographic information and military characteristics; no qualitative or quantitative analysis is required.
4. What is the specific Basis of Award for proposals and how are the 3 solicitation evaluation factors - price, technical, past performance - differentially weighted? This solicitation is in accordance with FAR Part 13, not FAR Part 15, therefore the evaluation factors are not weighted. You must meet the technical applicability and have the past performance, both as stated in the Statement of Work. The Government will award a contract resulting from this solicitation to the responsible offeror whose offer conforming to the solicitation will be most advantageous to the Government, price and other factors considered.
5. How does the VA desire we interviewees who drop out before the hour is over (i.e., attrition) be handled? If a Veteran decides to stop the process at any time, they may. They may revoke their authorization to use the information they provided to the contractor. The contractor will still need to meet the requirement of 30 completed interviews.
6. What is the population size of the veteran population of Central Texas areas that who subsequently received health care services outside the VA Health Care System that we are drawing from for the interviews? We do not know.
7. Is there a minimum length of time that a potential participant served in OEF/OIF? No minimum. Veterans can be from any era and do not need to have served in combat.
8. Does the government have specific proposal preparations instruction that are linked to the Basis for Award to accompany the SOW published? This solicitation is in accordance with FAR Part 13, Request for Quotations (RFQ), not FAR Part 15, Request for Proposals (RFP), therefore no specific proposal preparations.

9. Will the VA screen the Veterans to ensure they are eligible and will obtain whether they have recently received care outside of the VA or is that the responsibility of the contractor?
Responsibility of the contractor.

10. The solicitation states the vendor “Must be qualified to ask about sensitive personal topics from interviewees who have mental health conditions.”

a. What is the scope of the interview subject areas? The interview will ask about circumstances (e.g., suicide attempt, suicidal ideation) that led them to call the Veterans Crisis Line, whether they were referred for further mental health treatment from the crisis line, their prior VA treatment, and recommendations for improvement of this process.

b. Is this a “customer service survey” limited to the interviewee’s experience receiving healthcare services outside the VA from the quality of service perspective? No, this is not a customer service survey. This is a quality improvement project to understand where breakdowns in VA suicide prevention care are occurring in order to improve services. The intent is for the contractor to collect qualitative data and look for themes in the qualitative data. The VA team will aid the contractor in designing specific qualitative questions.

c. If this is limited to a customer service, quality of service, etc. survey, then what is the reason for the clinical professional requirements in the solicitation covered in questions #11 and #12 (below) It is not a customer service survey. It is a qualitative interview with Veterans at risk for suicide. Oftentimes, Veterans identified through this type of project are in need of clinical services, yet this need has not yet been identified. A suicide risk assessment will need to be conducted with each participant prior to and after the interview. It is possible that an interviewee may be at high risk for suicide and need clinical referral. Interviewers will need to be trained by a licensed clinical psychologist to conduct a suicide risk assessment under the supervision of the licensed clinical psychologist. Further, the interview questions are sensitive and ask about suicide history and treatment received for suicide risk. It is possible for a Veteran to become emotional during this type of interview. This type of interviewing requires specialized clinical training and supervision. Due to the sensitive nature of this project a licensed clinical psychologist is required.

d. Will the VA provide the questions or topic for the interview or is that the responsibility for the contractor working with government to develop them? We will provide questions and collaborate with the organization to create a final interview.

11. The solicitation states the vendor “Must have experience with referring patients with mental health needs to the appropriate counseling support, and specifically be capable of contacting emergency services for Veterans who are at imminent risk of danger to self or others.”

a. Will it involve their experiences in the military that caused their injuries, PTSD, etc.? No.

b. Will the interviews involve exploring their mental health issues and referring them for treatment? Yes, questions will focus on the experience of having a suicidal crisis, calling the Veterans crisis line, and the resulting care they did or did not received.

c. If this requires referrals for treatment will the VA provide a list of entities for the referral and what, if any, are the contractor’s responsibilities to complete and report the referral? The contractor will need to compile a list of mental health resources for Veterans, both within and outside the VA. The VA team will review this list with the contractor and then will make additional suggestions. It is the contractor’s responsibility to determine whether the participant

needs further mental health referral, make that referral, document that referral, and send that information back to the VA in aggregate.

d. In regard to the specific requirement to “capable of contacting emergency services for Veterans who are at risk of dangers to others or self”, what is the anticipated potential for this eventuality for the selected survey population if this is a quality of service or experience with service survey? In the VA team’s experience, in research studies with approximately 1000 Veteran participants, only 3-4 have needed emergency services due to risk of danger to self or others. While it is a rare occurrence, this is a high-risk population. The contractor must be prepared to handle any emergency situations that arise. Therefore, it is critical that this process be supervised by a licensed clinical psychologist, in order to ensure that Veterans are assessed properly and connected to any needed services.

e. In regard to the required experience referring patients with mental health needs to appropriate counseling support, what portions of the interview process will require a clinical evaluation of the interview or other scenario does the VA envision that will result in a diagnosis that a referral is required? A suicide risk assessment needs to be conducted at the beginning and end of the interview. The VA will provide this risk assessment. Based on this risk assessment further referral may be necessary.

f. Do the requirements in this section require that the interviewer(s) be clinical professional capable of identifying or diagnosing interviewees in these areas? The interview may be conducted by a bachelor’s level or higher interviewer who is supervised and trained by a licensed clinical psychologist.

g. If there is any expectation the interviewer will be referring interviewees for any type of treatment, how will the VA address the potential issue of if it would be ethical for someone to refer a person for treatment based on a one-hour interview with no additional background information – with the only exception being if a person stated that they were suicidal. Based on American Psychological Association guidelines, it is ethical to refer a Veteran to mental health care if they are experiencing suicidal ideation. It would be unethical to ignore a mental health need such as suicidal ideation. In our research samples, approximately 20% of Veterans have experienced suicidal ideation in the past month. This sample focuses on Veterans who have experienced a suicidal crisis in the past. Therefore, those numbers are likely higher and some of these Veterans will likely need mental health referrals. The risk assessment will provide information regarding whether a Veteran is experiencing suicidal ideation.

12. The solicitation states “Must have prior experience with interviews related to mental health and ongoing supervision from a psychologist.” Does this require interviewers be psychologist themselves? Supervised by a psychologist employed by the contractor for this contract or both? The interviewers may be bachelor’s-level or higher interviewers who have experience with mental health, research, clinical or qualitative interviewing, and data collection. They must be trained and supervised by a licensed clinical psychologist due to the sensitive nature of the interviews and because this population is at-risk for suicide. The clinical psychologist must provide 2 hours of weekly supervision to the interviewers. It is fine if a licensed clinical psychologist conducts the interviews instead.

13. The solicitation states that the vendor: “Must have experience in conducting research with the Veterans Administration with specific Veteran populations in relation to user feedback studies.” Please further define this requirement to include such areas as:

a. What defines “experience in conducting research with the Veterans Administration with specific Veteran populations in relation to user feedback studies?” Must be able to demonstrate that the contractor has worked on VA research contracts with Veteran populations. This is an at risk for suicide Veteran population. It is critical that the contractor understand data collection with this sensitive population, therefore experience is required. It is critical that the contractor be able to demonstrate that they were successfully able to conduct research with the VA.

b. Is this specific past performance on VA contracts providing these services? Yes

c. Is this specific past performance on contracts providing these services with the VISN 17 Center of Excellence (COE) or other VA Entity? Any VA research entity.

d. How will this requirement be evaluated and weighted? (i.e. if a vendor does not have the very specific qualifications you define above, will they be further excluded from the zone of consideration? Award will be made to responsible offeror who meets technical applicability, meets the past performance/qualifications and represents the lowest priced technically acceptable offer. Evaluation criteria are listed on page 20 of RFQ. Also see SOW.

14. Is there an incumbent for this work or is this a new requirement? No incumbent. New requirement.

15. If there is an incumbent, who is the incumbent and are they eligible to perform on this contract? N/A.

16. Is the VA going to obtain informed consent from the interviewees or is this the responsibility of the interviewer? Responsibility of the contractor.

17. Are incentives (e.g., gift cards, etc.) allowed to encourage participation? If so, is there a certain rate that cannot be exceeded? Yes, but that will be included in the price of the contract. There is not a rate to be exceeded.

18. I assume the COE will provide the specific interview questions, but I want to confirm whether or not the vendor will assist with this process. Yes, we will provide questions and collaborate with the organization to create a final interview.

19. I have a transcription provider, but I personally have not transcribed my psychological interviews. Instead, I take notes from the interviews and create a report. Is it acceptable to use a provider for the transcription services? Yes, vendor can use a transcription service as long as the SDVOSB performs at least 51% of the contract.

20. Is there a preference for receiving the transcriptions as they are completed or as one full package of 30? As they are completed would be preferred.

21. What is the turnaround from when you post next week? Two weeks.

22. Will VA cover the cost of advertising or would you like that included in the proposed budget? Must be included in proposal.

23. How long is the Period of Performance? One-year.

24. Will VA provide interview questions or will VA require the vendor to develop the questions? *We will provide questions and collaborate with the organization to create a final interview.*

25. If VA already has the questionnaire, can it be shared so that we may gauge the level of effort? *We do not have a finalized questionnaire to share.*

26. In addition to providing the interview recording and transcript, will VA require any data analysis from the data collected during the interview? *Data analysis is not required at this time. However, qualitative data to include demographic information and military service characteristics will need to be collected.*

27. Will VA consider paying incentives to Veterans for participation? If yes, will VA allocate a separate budget for incentives or should the vendor build it into the pricing? *Yes, incentives are allowed but will be included in the price of the contract. There will not be a separate budget.*

28. If this work is currently being performed by an incumbent contractor, is the current interviewer a licensed mental health professional with a licensure in Texas or in a state with licensure reciprocity with Texas? *No incumbent.*

29. Considering the requirement to “be qualified to ask about sensitive personal topics from interviewees who have mental health conditions,” will the VA amend the SOW to require such licensure and correspondingly amend the Statement of Equivalent Rates for Federal Hires found on pages 12 and 15 of the solicitation? *No.*

30. Does the VA have particular groups in mind that must be represented in the interviews (e.g. women, newly separated, race/ethnic groups, combat veterans, etc.)? *Yes, we will need to interview veterans who are not enrolled in VA care, some of whom have had suicidal ideation or behavior and have used the crisis line, and some of whom have had suicidal ideation or behavior who have not used the crisis line.*

31. Will VA expect progress meetings/reports and on what schedule? *Yes, we will expect monthly progress reports, and for qualitative transcripts and other data to be transferred monthly as it is collected.*

32. Does the VA have specific requirements for key personnel that must be included, such as a methodologist? *Yes, we need the interviews to be supervised by a licensed clinical psychologist with experience in working with people who have suicidal ideation or behavior and qualitative research experience.*