

Best Practices for Landscaping RFPs

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A little planning can ensure the highest-quality service available

As portfolios continue to expand and the year-round needs of a company's landscaping are addressed, the best practices for obtaining landscaping requests for proposals become even more important for your restaurants. Sourcing and selecting a partner, or partners, to deliver your landscaping services is a critical initiative, and one that needs to be mapped out.

RFP Goals

The priority is to source a qualified partner or partners to deliver landscaping services across your company's entire restaurant portfolio, but there are numerous hurdles that should be identified and treated as goals within the initiative:

- Determine a scope of work for your restaurant portfolio
- Set a true timeline for sourcing and transitioning these services
- Incorporate a best-in-class pricing model
- Create accurate and transparent bid templates and metrics
- Award strategies and transition plans

All of these items make up the building blocks of a successful landscaping RFP. When done in unison, they provide you with a greater chance of achieving your ultimate goal of sourcing your services to a qualified and capable partner at a price point that fits your budget.

Statement of Work

The goal of any landscaping program is to deliver a "clean and green" look for your restaurant portfolio, which is typically achieved through weekly in-season services. Mowing of all turf areas on a weekly basis is the most traditional service and one that should not be skipped. Reducing mowing services to every 10 days or every other week will have a negative impact on your locations. Weekly service is critical. This level of service should not be negotiable when delivering a scope of work back to your stakeholders.

Determining Timelines

Once an RFP is issued, your potential service partners will begin their rigorous process of collecting the service metrics they will need to prepare their quote. Depending upon your scope of work, square footages of turf and beds, linear feet of shrubs, tree counts and paved surfaces are just some of the metrics they need to gather—for every location! In today's world, technology has made this process much more efficient. However, having boots on the ground inspecting a percentage of properties still holds value for those bidders who want to fully grasp conditions in the field and expectations.

The length of time needed will vary depending upon portfolio size and complexity of the scope and bid process. Keep in mind that a range of two to six weeks is very common for portfolios that number in the thousands.

Expect that the process may take longer than anticipated, and plan accordingly. By allowing for the proper due diligence for your restaurants, you can avoid making rush or uninformed decisions about a supplier, or worse, not making any changes to a program that needs it because you ran out of time.

Once awards are made, expect at least 30 days to properly transition the program. The recommend time frame is 45 to 60 days, but the reality is that most companies simply don't make decisions fast enough or they don't start the bid process early enough to allow for a proper transition.

Bid Templates

Keeping your preferred pricing model in mind, let's look at the creation of the bid template. While the models themselves seem very straightforward, there are some things to remember when preparing your templates.

First, ensure you list all of the relevant site information, including restaurant identification numbers and full address, including zip code. Once completed, create your pricing headers and make sure all of your scope requirements fall into a specific header. For example, if you are requiring shrub trimming twice a year, make sure one of your pricing headers covers that service. Often, it is easier when creating your scope of work to bold the categories that have a corresponding pricing header. It also ensures your bidders are putting the right costs into the right buckets.

This also helps you realize where the money is going. If, for example, someone on your side says, "Let's include the replacement of all irrigation heads into the budget," that scope will be linked to a pricing header and you will be able to see how that service impacts your budget. It will also help you determine if your bidders are factoring in everything you want.

Every service you want completed for your restaurants comes at a cost. By providing full transparency to each service (or service grouping, like the weekly services that include a handful of items), you can better analyze the results and get a true understanding of the value of each service needed.

Regional Variations

For many companies, restaurant portfolios are often spread out across the country. This means you likely have some locations that have a seven- to eight-month landscape season, and other locations that require 12 months of service.

Your challenge comes in building out a scope of work that meets the demands of all of your restaurants. Don't attempt to address this in your scope of work, but rather in your bid sheet.

When determining your scope of work, identify your critical service items: those deliverables that need to be performed during a restaurant's landscape season. For example, mowing of all turf areas is the most basic of services. Traditionally, this work is to be performed on a weekly basis as needed during the landscape season. That verbiage works within a scope of work whether your locations are in Maine or in California. Our recommendation is to keep it simple and direct.

Even for those of you who only want an annual price, we have made transparent the value of listing out frequencies. In its most basic format, the best thing to do, as discussed, is to list out every core service within a category header, then set a baseline of frequency for every location.

There are shortcuts to make this process an easy one. Group your locations by state, which will reduce the variances and help you shape your frequencies. This will expedite the

process. But there is a much simpler way to approach this. Use your vendors!

A growing trend in the industry is to review your location list with a trusted partner or partners prior to issuing an RFP and have them set the frequencies for every location. They will likely have significantly more experience in these markets and can efficiently assign frequencies for each location based on the scope requirements. In a perfect world, you take this information back to your stakeholders, whether regional restaurant facility managers or corporate staff, and have them review and provide feedback. If your vendor partner recommends five fertilizations in North Carolina and you feel you only need four in that market, make the change.

By reviewing this data prior to the issuing of an RFP, you will end up delivering a bid sheet and scope of work that is accurate, transparent and best in class.

Implementation

Performing due diligence during an RFP should include a review and discussion of implementation, how it would work and what transparency will exist in the process, as well as a confirmation that you believe the supplier's methodology makes sense for your stakeholders.

A successful implementation plan provides critical site knowledge for all parties as the individual service crews ramp up and begin services. It provides an environment where the transition of the actual services minimizes the operational impact while maximizing restaurant brand and stakeholder's goals.

What departments from the supplier side are engaged in the implementation? A best-in-class solution engages all three critical components: field management, operations and senior management.

What are some of the more business-critical deliverables within an implementation plan? Weekly conference calls: Some programs require three calls per week while others require only twice a month. The more you are engaged in the success of the program, the more successful it will be.

If your supplier wants to communicate, let them! The value of open communication is priceless to the success of the landscape program.

Detailed timelines: Make sure the process for site walks, sourcing, asset reviews, scheduled dates for service start up and critical deliverables, like spring cleanups and irrigation startups, are spelled out ahead of time.

By reviewing the timetable prior to service startup, you will know if there is a blueprint for success—and if it is achievable.

A final piece to consider: What are you transitioning from? Moving from one national provider to another is a much easier transition than moving from a local model to one that is consolidated. There are critical functions that must be in place to provide the transparency to make sure the local stakeholders buy off on the solution. It is the burden and responsibility of the awarded supplier to drive this process. Now, while there are some key processes that as a corporate stakeholder you need to do to ensure a successful program, those requirements should be spelled out and clearly positioned by your service partner to allow for the easiest possible transition.

Saving your company 5, 10, 20 percent or more is great, but if the program and services can't be delivered as required, the savings will be washed away in missed services, lost business and, more importantly, loss of credibility with your own stakeholders. Before making that final buying decision, make sure you are confident that service is going to be delivered to your restaurants.

By implementing just some of these practices, you will guarantee a much better chance of sourcing and delivering a successful landscape program for your restaurants. By staying on course, you will likely end up where you and your stakeholders want to be. Good luck with your initiatives.

Kevin Smith is Chief Operating Officer at Ferrandino & Son Inc. and has 11 years of experience in facilities services and exterior maintenance. He will be leading an Educational Session at RFMA 2014, sharing in-depth insight into best practices in landscaping and snow removal.