



Training



# Step Into a Vendor's Shoes: Activity Kit for Paper Airplane RFP

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# Paper Airplane Activity: Guide

## Activity Goals:

This exercise is designed to help participants understand what it's like to respond to an RFP from the perspective of the proposer. Participants will be divided into two teams, and each team will receive a different RFP: one that is well-designed, outcome-driven, with clear instructions for respondents (Blue Team), and one that is minimally designed, compliance-oriented, and difficult to respond to (Yellow Team).

By the end of the activity, participants should have a better understanding of the importance of designing a streamlined RFP with clear instructions, reduced compliance requirements, and a clear description of the problem the government faces and the goal the government is attempting to achieve.

## Background Notes:

There are two RFPs: Blue Team (receives the RFP “Solutions for Successful Transfer of Confidential Paper;” prepared by Jane Smith) and Yellow Team (receives the RFP “FIN-2018062618-345A;” prepared by John Smith). The main exercise differences to know going in:

a. **Yellow Team:**

- There are many compliance rules that this team must follow, therefore you will be rejecting many of their proposals
  - They must deliver their proposals to a box labeled, “FIN-2018062618-345A”
  - It is intended to make it hard by creating two other boxes that are very similar
    - FIN-2018062619-345A, FIN-2018062618-545A

b. **Blue Team:**

- Does not have many compliance issues that they are required to follow
- They must deliver their proposals to a box labeled, “Solutions for Successful Transfer of Confidential Paper Box”

## Prep Needed Beforehand:

- Create 4 boxes with the following labels and place them at the front of the room:
  - FIN-2018062618-345A
  - FIN-2018062619-345A
  - FIN-2018062618-545A
  - Solutions for Successful Transfer of Confidential Paper Box
- Prepare two “judges” to judge the submissions. Judges should read their respective RFP ahead of the activity to understand what requirements they will be looking for:
  - Team Yellow Judge
  - Team Blue Judge
- Print out a copy of the Yellow Team RFP (John Smith) and the Blue Team RFP (Jane Smith) for every participant in the room. The John Smith RFP should be printed on yellow paper and the Jane Smith RFP should be printed on blue paper. At the start of the activity, each participant will be assigned one of the two RFPs, but you’ll want sufficient copies for every participant to leave the activity with both RFPs for their future reference.
- Write “RFP Release Time” on the board (or project on a slide if no board is available)
- Draw two columns—“Top Yellow Score” and “Top Blue Score”—on the board (or project on a slide if no board is available):

Top Yellow Score	Top Blue Score

## Activity Steps:

1. Divide the room of participants up unevenly, with roughly two-thirds of participants on the Yellow Team (they receive the John Smith procurement) and about one-third on the Blue Team (they receive the Jane Smith procurement). Pass out the assigned RFP to each participant.
2. Give participants a few minutes to read the RFP. Once they have read the RFP, write the exact time on the board (or slide) and label it “RFP Release Time” (e.g., “RFP Release Time = 2:35pm”). Both teams will then have 7 minutes of “proposal development time.” To foster a fun environment, you may want to play music during this time! We suggest flying or airplane themed songs, like:
  - M.I.A. – “Paper Planes”
  - Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers – “Learning to Fly”
  - Magneto – “Vuela Vuela”
  - Steve Miller Band – “Jet Airliner”
  - Frank Sinatra – “Fly Me to the Moon”
3. Do not answer any questions during the participants’ “proposal development” time.
4. As submissions come in, each judge should analyze the submission for the following and return submissions that do not meet the compliance requirements:
  - a. **Yellow Judge:**
    - Did they walk backwards in delivering the submission? (If no, return)
    - Was it placed in the right box? (If no, return)
    - Was it placed upside down? (If no, return)
    - Was the respondents full, legal name (including prefixes, suffixes and middle names) on four separate folds on the paper airplane? (If no, return)
    - Was there a pointed tip? (If yes, return)

- Was it delivered within the 7-minute window? (If no, return) (If yes, but violated the above, return for resubmission)

**b. Blue Judge:**

- Was it placed in the right box? (If no, return)
- Did the submissions include their full name visibly written on the submission? (If no, return)
- Did they write the total number of folds next to their name? (If no, return)
- Was there a pointed tip? (If yes, return)
- Was it delivered within the 7-minute window? (If no, return) (If yes, but violated the above, return for resubmission)

5. After submissions are in, judges should test the planes:

- Pretend as though you are writing down scores for each flight. If all works, the Yellow planes should not be great, but there should be some good Blue planes.
- Write a score of 30 in the "Top Yellow Score" column and 85 in the "Top Blue Score" column. Announce that the Blue Team was the winner:

<b>Top Yellow Score</b>	<b>Top Blue Score</b>
30	85

6. Ask selected members from each team to answer the following questions:

- Is the County Manager elected? (Yellow team should know, Blue should not)
- What problem was the RFP attempting to solve? (Only Blue team should know)
- Does the County care about outcomes? What do they care about? (Only Blue team)
- How are RFP submissions judged? (Only Blue team should know)
- What are good model designs of paper airplanes? (Only Blue team should know)



- How much time did you have to respond? (Both teams may feel that the time was insufficient)
7. Hand each team the opposite color RFP than they originally received and give them a chance to see what constraints and supports the other team was working with while creating their paper airplanes.
8. Facilitate a short discussion around the lessons to be learned from the activity:
- The Blue team had more useful information than the Yellow Team and was better prepared to work on their proposals. They also faced far fewer unnecessary compliance requirements and better understood the governments' needs when writing this silly RFP!
  - Highlight what this means for actual RFP writing. Some advice to think about emphasizing:
    - Define the problem, share background, and connect your procurement to clearly defined department objectives.
    - Conduct strategic processes to develop important background information, analyses, and contacts to enhance the procurement.
    - Make it easy for the vendor community! 1) Give adequate time to respond, 2) Don't hide the ball and make respondents search for important information; and 3) Remove unnecessary requirements or make them easier to fulfill.
  - Encourage participants to share what they took away from the activity.

The **Procurement Excellence Network** is an initiative of the Government Performance Lab designed to help public sector leaders use government procurement as a tool to improve resident outcomes and advance equity. The **Government Performance Lab**, housed at the Taubman Center for State and Local Government at the Harvard Kennedy School, conducts research on how governments can improve the results they achieve for their citizens. An important part of this research model involves providing hands-on technical assistance to state and local governments. Through this involvement, we gain insights into the barriers that governments face and the solutions that can overcome these barriers. By engaging current students and recent graduates in this effort, we are able to provide experiential learning as well.

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