

## DECISION MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Cindy Lombardi  
State Purchasing and Contract Director

**FROM:** Eva Reynolds  
Purchasing Agent for CDE

**DATE:** December 21, 2015

**SUBJECT:** Intent to Award Justification & Approval Request

**RE: RFP-DAA-2016000062, Grade 10 and College Entrance Exams**

With the completion of the RFP evaluation process for the above solicitation, I am requesting approval to issue the intent to award as a result of the following.

The Request for Proposals was published on November 2, 2015 with mandatory intent to reply notices requested no later than November 11, 2015. Two (2) companies provided notice of their intent to respond, ACT, Inc. and the College Board.

An evaluation committee of 15 members was formed to represent all populations of school districts from across state, i.e., large and small, urban and rural districts, with one member representing Colorado Department of Education.

On December 4, 2015, 12:00 PM, the public opening was held for this solicitation and each of the intent to respond companies presented proposals. The members of the evaluation committee met that afternoon to receive evaluation guidelines and distribution of the responses received. The list of Respondents with their proposed costs or best and final offers for the base solution were:

ACT, Inc.	\$23,379,894 (BAFO)
College Board	\$14,840,000 (BAFO)

With only two respondents, it was determined to invite both for a December 17th oral presentation/interview. Clarification questions were forwarded to the respondents with instructions to present their written response to the committee at oral presentations/interviews.

To assist the evaluation committee, two content specialist sub-committees were formed, one in the field of math and one in the field of English Language Arts (reading

and writing) chaired by an evaluation committee member. All sub-committee members signed Non-Disclosure and Non-Conflict of Interest statements prior to receiving documents. On December 10 and 11 each sub-committee met to discuss their findings and analysis regarding alignment of test documents with Colorado Academic Standards (CAS). Alignment with CAS is critical since it is a requirement of the statute passed in the 2015 legislative session. See C.R.S. Section 22-7-1006.3. Content sub-committee findings were presented by their representative to the full evaluation committee.

On December 17th each of the two Offerors presented a 55 minute demonstration of their proposed systems and then continued with a 55 minute question and answer session. Best and final offers were presented to me in sealed envelopes.

The committee reconvened following the oral presentations/interviews on December 18th to discuss the demonstrations, responses to the questions, proposal clarifications, and content specialists' findings to determine if they could make a recommendation of intent to award.

First to be reviewed was the College Board proposal and presentation. The committee noted the proposal and presentation were of high quality and College Board answered questions thoroughly. College Board included some philosophical background, demonstrated College Board's beliefs, and motivation/commitment. They spoke about demographic inequities, determination to improve access for students, and importance of partnerships. This firm's proposal has many identified strengths, such a great support system for students, to include Kahn Academy which will provide item-by-item feedback for practice, and Road Trip Nation, which will be available in a few months. Also identified as strengths were item reporting and that their assessment is built around outside research and no longer by "committee". It was reported by the content specialist's representative that their assessments has a close alignment between there PSAT/SAT tests and is more in line with Colorado Academic Standards (CAS) than the ACT tests. However, there were concerns with the lack of Colorado connections and proposed accommodations for testing of on-line students.

Next to be discussed was ACT, Incorporated's proposal. This firm also has many strengths, with its current relationship with Colorado and their association with the Department of Education noted as a major strength. Score reports in 2016-2017 would feature indicators of College and Career Readiness based on the Common Core State Standards and ACT is willing to conduct linkage studies to 9th grade PARCC. Their solution for testing of on-line students is very strong. However, weaknesses were also addressed, among these is the fact ACT Aspire (10<sup>th</sup> grade test) and ACT (college entrance exam) are two separate companies under one umbrella, ACT, Inc., which would result in state/district personnel working with two different management teams. Another identified concern was that the off-the shelf solution will require customization to come in line with requirements. The Content Specialist's representative reported that ACT's tests have a larger alignment gap between the Aspire (10<sup>th</sup> grade) and ACT

(11<sup>th</sup> grade) than the College Board gap. In reviewing the budget proposal presented by this firm, it was noted how every year of the 5 year contract the price increases, compared with no annual cost increase associated with the College Board cost proposal.

Augmentation of exams, a RFP request, would not be accomplished by either company until at least year 2 of the contract because of the short time line requested by CDE to start administration of tests. ACT, Inc. did provide a separate cost for this solution and College Board did not. This was addressed during the oral presentation. College Board personnel informed the committee they did not calculate this into their cost proposal as they have three different avenues to assist in the augmentation, test bank, field testing, and research. Not knowing which process or combination of processes Colorado may request, they left this cost to be negotiated if awarded.

The committee continued with strong discussions regarding both proposals and what they can bring to the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade students of Colorado. The final result was that College Board aligns closer to the Colorado Academic Standards, and has a smaller gap between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade tests. Regarding support systems, ACT has test preparation materials including Preparing for the ACT (posted online and printed), ACT Online Prep, and the Real ACT Prep Guide, but the committee felt College Board's support systems were much stronger and provided a higher quality of preparation and practice for the students. Given that College Board's proposal is \$8,539,894 lower in cost and well below the proposed budget; the Committee saw this as a positive which would provide CDE personnel with additional funding to enhance the assessment environment for Colorado students.

Following the evaluation committee's complete review of the merits of the proposals received, clarifications, opinions regarding financial statements, the attached strength and weaknesses, and identifying the proposal that will be most advantageous to the State, **the committee recommends intent to award to College Board.**

As result of my review of the committee's evaluations, respondent's strengths and weakness, and clarifications, I am in agreement with the committee's recommendation and request permission to issue intent to award to **College Board.**

To support this recommendation I have attached for your review the Committee Evaluation Document, Evaluation Tabulation, and the identified Strengths and Weaknesses of each offeror. Please contact me if further clarification is requested.