

This document consists of questions raised during the March 22, 2016, online Information Session on the Service Request Process. This document is intended to supplement information contained in the webinar, which can be found at <http://www.humanservices.alberta.ca/pqr>. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the Service Request Process, we encourage you to view the webinar.

## SERVICE REQUEST PROCESS WEBINAR

# Frequently Asked Questions

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### Service Request Process

**Q1:** *If we responded to a Pre-Qualification Request (PQR), and have not received notification that we have been approved as a Qualified Service Provider (QSP), who should we contact?*

**A:** If you have not received notification regarding QSP approval, please contact our Corporate Procurement Office at [HS.CorporateProcurementOffice@gov.ab.ca](mailto:HS.CorporateProcurementOffice@gov.ab.ca)

**Q2:** *How is the new Service Request process intended to benefit both Service Providers and Albertans who need our services?*

**A:** The Service Request process is the mechanism by which Human Services, through Service Delivery Regions, will request services of service providers that have qualified under one or more PQRs. It is an indication of potential work that describes the services required, identifies a maximum contract amount and term, and describes additional qualifications, if applicable. If interested, QSP(s) respond within the allotted time by signing and returning the Service Request, following which a Services Agreement (or 'Contract') is issued to the most qualified QSP as determined by the Service Delivery Region.

The implementation of PQR lists (and supporting Service Request process) is a necessary first step in establishing greater consistency, accountability and transparency in how Human Services procures for services. PQR lists show which service providers are engaged by the ministry in serving Albertans' needs. Albertans receiving services and supports have access to a broad range of service providers that meet a consistent set of qualifications. QSPs will receive information about new work opportunities and experience improved consistency and transparency in how contracts are awarded.

**Q3:** *Will new Service Request documents be similar to the Service Request included in the PQR packages?*

**A:** Yes, aside from some minor changes to the wording and layout of the document, the Service Request documents are the same.

**Q4:** *How often will Service Requests be issued and who is eligible to respond to them?*

**A:** Service Requests are issued by Service Delivery Regions when particular services are required. Service Requests are only sent to QSPs that have qualified for the required service category and region(s), and only these QSPs are eligible to respond. The *Service Request Process Information Session webinar* provides detailed information about the four Service Request scenarios.

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**Q5:** *When a Service Request is issued by a Service Delivery Region, are QSPs able to discuss the specifics with the Service Delivery Region contact prior to responding?*

**A:** Yes, contact information for the Service Delivery Region can be found on the first page of the Service Request document and QSPs are encouraged to contact this individual for additional details.

**Q6:** *Will the Service Request include the scoring matrix by which QSPs will be evaluated?*

**A:** In cases where the Service Delivery Region is issuing a competitive request for services, evaluation categories and associated weighting will be outlined in each Service Request. All signed Service Requests will be reviewed by the Service Delivery Region, and evaluated against the requirements set out in the request.

**Q7:** *Will the evaluation results be made available to QSPs who have responded the Service Request?*

**A:** QSPs who respond to a Service Request may contact the Service Delivery Region for feedback and information related to their submission.

**Q8:** *Are Service Requests replacing Request for Proposals (RFPs)?*

**A:** If a service is within the scope of an existing PQR, it is expected that Human Services will use the PQR list to procure services using a Service Request. For services for which the Service Delivery Region intends to issue a competitive procurement, a comprehensive Service Request will be issued in most cases; however, there may be circumstances (such as for new services or complex service procurement) in which a full RFP is required. If the work is outside the scope of an existing PQR then alternate procurement tools such as an RFP (posted on Alberta Purchasing Connection (APC)) may be used.

**Q9:** *Has the process for a Service Provider to renegotiate a contract with Human Services changed?*

**A:** No, there have been no changes to the contract negotiation process. Any proposed revisions to the contract are discussed between the Service Provider and the Service Delivery Regional contact on a case-by-case basis.

**Q10:** *When a QSP uptakes new individuals into the program(s) or service(s) they provide under a Service Agreement (Contract), is a new Service Agreement required?*

**A:** No. Taking on new clients into an existing agreement is not considered new work, therefore neither a new Service Request or Service Agreement would be required.

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**Q11:** *Our current contract allows for sub-contracting. Will this change with the new Service Request Process?*

**A:** The Service Request is the tool that Human Services uses to inform QSPs about potential work opportunities. The current practice relating to sub-contracting is not impacted by the Service Request process. Sub-contracting is referenced in the Master Agreement for each PQR.

**Q12:** *Is grant funding included in the new Service Request Process?*

**A:** No, programs funded through grant arrangements are outside of the scope of the PQR and related processes.

**Q13:** *Where do QSPs access the new contract templates?*

**A:** New contract templates were included in the PQR approval package that was sent to all QSPs. If you have not received a PQR approval package, please contact our Corporate Procurement Office: [HS.CorporateProcurementOffice@gov.ab.ca](mailto:HS.CorporateProcurementOffice@gov.ab.ca)

### **Sole Sourcing**

**Q14:** *Why has Human Services decided to sole source with incumbents for a maximum term up to March 31, 2018? Will a Notice of Work (NOW) be issued during this period, or only after this period?*

**A:** In order to minimize disruptions and ensure continuity of services during the transition period, Human Services intends to sole-source with incumbent QSPs for pre-existing, direct, client-facing services for terms that will extend up to March 31, 2018. All QSPs have been notified of this intention in their QSP approval package.

Where new services, increased capacity requirements or other operational needs arise during the transition period -and it is determined that the need is best met through a sole-sourced approach - a NOW will be issued to QSPs to inform them of the intention to sole-source, describe the services and provide an opportunity for response.

**Q15:** *In what circumstances would Human Services issue a Notice of Work (NOW) during this transition period (now until March 31, 2018)?*

**A:** In situations Human Services feels a sole source contract is required for new work, a NOW will be issued to QSPs within that specific PQR (see previous question).

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**Q16:** *After March 2018, what process will be used to determine if a contract should be sole sourced?*

**A:** The ministry is shifting to more open and competitive procurement in the future, where it makes sense and best meets the needs of the clients we serve. This approach will phase in over the next few years. Determining which services can most appropriately and effectively be procured through a range of mechanisms will require measured and thoughtful consideration of a number of factors. The Procurement Advisory Table, comprised of service provider leaders across the province, will have a key role in informing the design of this strategic procurement plan.

Decisions about the most appropriate mechanism for procuring services will be determined by each Service Delivery Region in the context of a ministry-wide strategic procurement plan. This decision may factor in issues such as client choice where a specific QSP is desired by the client in need, or when a highly specialized skill set is required that can only be provided by one QSP. Where a sole source contract is intended to be used, a Notice of Work will be issued to all other QSPs on the PQR list. A sole source contract may also be required if an unforeseeable situation of urgency exists for a particular service, in which case a NOW will not be provided to other eligible QSPs.

**Q17:** *For future contracts, will sole sourced incumbents be required to submit additional information to the Human Services?*

**A:** Any additional information requirements will be outlined in the Services Agreement, which will be reviewed and signed by the incumbent prior to the commencement of service delivery.

**Q18:** *What function does the Notice of Work (NOW) serve?*

**A:** The NOW is a tool by which to inform QSPs of a Service Delivery Region's intention to sole source with a single QSP, without competitively tendering the contract. The NOW will include the intended QSP, proposed duration of the agreement, proposed services and estimated value for the engagement. A notice period is provided during which others QSPs may submit objections or submissions, which the Service Delivery Region will consider in terms of the potential for more open procurement in the future.

**Q19:** *Are there any service areas that are exempt from open procurement, and will they continue to use sole source contracts to meet service requirements?*

**A:** The Government of Alberta is subject to directives and trade obligations which require the Ministry to base procurements on the principles of openness, non-discrimination, non-circumvention and transparency.

Although an exception exists for health and social services in trade agreements, particularly in the New West Partnership Trade Agreement (NWPTA), these obligations clearly state that exceptions must not be used to avoid competition and discriminate between suppliers.

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As described in Q16, work is underway to develop a strategic procurement framework that minimizes client disruption and supports client choice where required, while respecting and complying with our fair trade requirements. While not yet identified, Human Services expects that this framework will include a continued role for competitive procurement and appropriate sole sourcing activities.

**Q20:** *If a Service Provider has a sole source contract with Human Services until March 2018, will there be yearly reporting requirements or will it be based on the two year term?*

**A:** Reporting requirements will be defined in each particular Services Agreement.

### **New QSPs and Re-submissions**

**Q21:** *We are a new QSP and do not have a contract with Human Services, nor have we in the past. If Human Services plans to sole source required services with current incumbents up until March 2018, will there be any opportunity for new QSPs to obtain work?*

**A:** Service Requests may be issued to all QSPs (for a particular service category/region combination) during the transition period when:

- Services are not direct/client-facing
- The service has been competitively tendered in the past
- New services are required
- A need for increased capacity for an existing service is identified
- To meet ongoing business or operational requirements

**Q22:** *If opportunities to provide services do arise, will preference be given to other QSPs that have history contracting with Human Services?*

**A:** As discussed above, during the transitional period, Human Services does not foresee major changes to the way services are procured for direct client services and supports. However, if a Service Delivery Region determines a need to issue a competitive Service Request, all QSPs will have an equal opportunity to respond. QSP responses to Service Requests will be evaluated consistently and objectively against the requirements set out in the Service Request. Based on this, the Service Delivery Region will determine which QSP is most qualified to deliver the required service.

**Q23:** *As a QSP who has not contracted with Human Services in the past, how are we able to inform Service Delivery Regions about our unique program outside of the Service Request Process?*

**A:** QSPs are encouraged to reach out to the Service Delivery Region network to discuss unique services/programs they offer.

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**Q24:** *As Human Services moves from sole source contracts to more open procurement approaches, how will the ministry gather information about the skills and qualifications of new QSPs that have not provided services in the past?*

**A:** In certain instances, a Service Delivery Region may not know which QSP would be best qualified to deliver specific services, and more information may be required to assess qualifications and abilities. In these instances, a non-competitive Service Request will be issued to all QSPs (for a particular service category/region combination) to gather more detailed information about particular skills and qualifications to meet a particular service need. The information will be used to support the decision to sole source or issue a competitive Service Request.

**Q25:** *Are Service Providers with experience in other provinces able to apply to become a QSP in Alberta?*

**A:** Yes, provided they meet the minimum requirements set out in the PQR.

**Q26:** *Can approved QSPs re-submit when the PQRs reopen to include more/less service categories, regions, etc.?*

**A:** Yes. During any open PQR period, existing QSPs are welcome to make changes to the service categories, services regions, etc. for which they wish to be considered qualified. It is important to note that the most recent submission under the PQR will replace any previous submissions.

**Q27:** *Are Qualified Service Providers allowed to apply for part time or casual employment with the Government of Alberta?*

**A:** Any person is welcome to pursue employment with the Government of Alberta. Government of Alberta employees have responsibilities under the [Code of Conduct and Ethics for the Public Service of Alberta](#), which includes disclosing any supplementary employment that causes an actual or perceived conflict of interest. You would be expected to discuss this with your potential employer prior to accepting a position with the Government of Alberta. It should also be noted that being a QSP is not a guarantee of work, and that any conflict of interest may only arise at the point at which a Services Agreement is entered into.

**Q28:** *Can a Service Provider refer clients to Human Services to request specific services?*

**A:** Human Services offers a broad array of integrated programs and services. In some instances, a referral will be appropriate and in the best interests of the client. If a service provider believes a client would benefit from a specific service offered by Human Services, the Service Provider should discuss this with the Service Delivery Region.

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**Q29:** *How have Service Providers been consulted on the Service Request process?*

**A:** A broad consultation with Service Providers on the Service Request Process was not undertaken. The shift to PQRs and competitive tendering aligns with common practice across the Government of Alberta, not just Human Services. The implementation of PQR lists (and supporting Service Request process) is a necessary first step in establishing greater consistency, accountability and transparency in how Human Services procures for services. These are operational requirements that also support the ministry's implementation of an integrated and aligned approach to service delivery.

### **Program Specific**

**Q30:** *Will Parent Link Centres continue to be sole sourced?*

**A:** Parent Link Centers are currently funded through grant agreements. They are outside of the scope of the PQR and related processes.

**Q31:** *What are examples of 'expanded capacity' or 'new service requirements' in the disability services sector that would result in the issuance of an RFP?*

**A:** Expanded capacity requirements could result from a large increase of individuals requiring a particular service, which cannot be addressed by the current pool of incumbent QSPs. New service requirements could result from emerging programs, or identification of a necessary service/program that is not currently provided to Albertans, but is considered within scope of the Disability Services PQR. In these scenarios, a competitive Service Request (or, where required, a full RFP) would likely be issued to QSPs on the PQR list for that service.

**Q32:** *Has the Master Agreement been finalized?*

**A:** Yes, the Master Agreement has been finalized and executed with QSPs. Please contact your regional contract specialist to discuss and get further clarification about the agreement and its articles.

**Q33:** *Our current contract expires on June 30; can we reasonably assume we will not be issued a new contract until July 1?*

**A:** Yes, this is a reasonable assumption for incumbent QSPs providing direct, client-facing services. QSPs will receive contract documents from the Service Delivery Region prior to July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016, so they can be reviewed and signed by the July 1 deadline. Service Delivery Regions will be working with Service Providers to ensure continuity of service.

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**Q34:** *We currently have a contract for Family Wellness, which was sent in December 2015 (as an extension to the Sept 1/15 to Dec. 31/15 we received at the beginning of this school year). The end date is August 31, 2016. This aligns with our school calendar, and historically has been the term of our contract (Sept 1 to Aug 31). Will this date change to the April 1st or July 1st contract date mentioned?*

**A:** Unless you have received notification that your contract is part of the July 1st renewals, the Service Delivery Region will work with QSPs to determine start dates, end dates and durations through negotiations, as per current practice.

**Q35:** *Will this process affect Program Unit Funding/Family Support for Children with Disabilities (FSCD) Common Approach agreements?*

**A:** Yes, potentially. The FSCD program contracts with a number of school authorities for some or all of the FSCD specialized services a family is accessing through the PUF/FSCD Common Approach. School authorities would need to be on the PQR list for FSCD to contract with them for these and any other FSCD services. FSCD has provided information to school authorities to ensure they are aware of how to become a QSP.