PEAK SUPPORT

Crafting an RFP

to Outsource Customer Support

A Complete Guide to Elevate Your Customer Support Outsourcing Game

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More and more companies are using RFPs to outsource customer support, even for small teams.

RFPs allow you to objectively compare bids from multiple vendors, and can often help you get a lower price. But issuing an RFP and managing the process can be stressful and time consuming.

We assembled this guide to help you understand the process of crafting an effective RFP to outsource your customer support team. In addition, we've included an RFP template you can download and use as-is. If you want to skip the guide, you can download the RFP template **here.**

Let's get started!

What is a Request for Proposal or RFP?

Request for Proposals are business documents that companies use to announce a project. RFPs typically contain valuable information about the customer support team being outsourced, such as a company profile, ticket types, ticket volume, channels, tech stack, hours of operation, contract terms and conditions, and criteria you are using to make your decision. In addition, they contain all the questions that you want each submitter to answer.

Do you need an RFP?

Large companies often require RFPs to be used when evaluating vendors for a project of a certain size. For smaller companies, without such a requirement, the decision to use an RFP is more nuanced.

If you're only planning on outsourcing a handful of agents – say, fewer than 20 – it might be impractical to write up a request for proposal. RFPs require a lot of work for both the companies that issue them, as well as the vendors who respond to them.

here are a few questions you can answer to **determine whether you need one:**

- Do you have experience with outsourcing customer support? If so, you may have a good sense of what you want already, and you may even have a short list of vendors you want to work with.
- How many vendors do you want to evaluate? If you're comfortable making a decision based on conversations with a small number of vendors, an RFP may not be necessary to outsource your customer support team.
- How many decision-makers will be involved? If there are a lot of cooks in the kitchen, an RFP may help you objectively organize the data on all of the vendors you're evaluating. If you're the sole decision-maker, an RFP probably isn't necessary.
- How much time do you have? Creating an RFP and reviewing all the submissions will take a lot of time. If your capacity to review large documents is limited, then consider skipping the RFP or limiting it to just a few preferred vendors.

RFP vs RFI: What's the difference?

RFI or request for information is normally the step companies take when picking which vendor they'd like to partner with. The process involves gathering vendors' general information which could include the vendor's capabilities, their line of expertise, what schedules they support, if they already have the infrastructure and necessary tools in place, and other factors that could prove their competence to deliver what is expected.

If you think that sounds a lot like an RFP, you're correct.

So are RFI and RFP the same? Not entirely.

An RFI's primary goal is to establish a relationship, long term or otherwise, between companies and vendors. An RFP, on the other hand, applies to a particular team that your company intends to outsource within a defined time frame.

Most companies looking to outsource their customer support teams will use an RFP. However, an RFI can be a lighter-touch way to evaluate potential vendors with an objective set of criteria. For example, you could use an RFI to narrow down your search from a large set of potential vendors to your top two or three.

How can you identify vendors to include in the RFP?

Your initial list could contain as many as 10 to 11 BPO firms. Not sure where to find them? Scan through reviews on sites such as **G2** or do your research on Google. You may also reach out in online communities such as Support Driven or CX Accelerator, or ask friends and colleagues who already have experience with BPOs.

Do you still have to meet with the BPO sales team?

Absolutely! Keep in mind that some things will emerge in the sales process that are tough to show on an RFP. How helpful are the salespeople? What is the company culture like? Are these people you want to work with? Do you trust them? Vendors will all make big claims about quality and the level of support they provide – do you believe them?

Many companies have video meetings first, to decide who they want to send the RFP to. Reviewing an RFP submission can take hours of time from multiple people on your team, so it's worth investing time up front to see if the vendor is a good fit. Budget at least 30 minutes per vendor for a high-level evaluation. Many companies have multiple calls with vendors before RFPs are submitted.

You may already know who you want to work with before the RFP process begins. At a minimum, you should feel confident that all of the BPOs submitting proposals are potential contenders. If you don't like a vendor after the first call, don't invite them to submit a proposal.

Many BPOs, including Peak Support, will not participate in an RFP process unless a meeting is held first. This is because some companies use RFPs as a formality, a box to check, when the team already has a preferred vendor they want to work with. So if we get an RFP but no meeting, we assume we have no chance of winning. Once the vendors have submitted their proposals, you will likely want to hold multiple meetings with the finalists in order to make your final decisions.

These meetings could serve several purposes:

- Ask clarifying questions. You will likely have some questions after reviewing the RFP submissions.
- Define the solution in detail. If you only have one meeting before the RFP, you probably have details to work out including the exact team size and schedule.

- Ensure information security. You may want to meet with the vendor's security team to ensure your customers' data will be in good hands.
- Meet other stakeholders. These could include operations leadership, account management, and training and quality leads.

Crafting your RFP

Now that you know the basics, it's time to craft your RFP. Here's how.

1. Define your objectives

Review the current state of your customer service operations and identify areas where outsourcing can benefit the business. If you're primarily looking for cost savings, determine your target budget. Outsourcing can cost anywhere from $8/hour to $40+/hour depending on location, quality, and other factors.

Keep in mind, you get what you pay for. A lower price may mean the agents aren't being paid well, so you won't get high quality.

Here's a general guide:

- India: $8 to $12 per hour
- Philippines: $10 to $15 per hour
- Caribbean: $14 to $16 per hour
- Nearshore / Latin America: $17 to $20 per hour
- United States: $38/hour or more

Or it means the outsourcer doesn't offer a lot of support for things like training, quality assurance, business analytics, and workforce management. If you have to do a lot more work in-house to manage the team, you may actually be spending more if you choose the lowest-cost option. If you're comparing outsourcing to the cost of keeping a team in-house, keep in mind you'll be saving a lot on overhead costs. A good BPO should handle recruiting, training, and quality assurance, among other functions, which saves a lot of time for your internal team. This article outlines some of the hidden costs of in-house customer service.

If you're focused on quality, determine the KPIs you'll expect the outsourcer to achieve, and what other factors are important in driving quality. These will translate into questions for your RFP, or questions you'll ask BPOs in your pre-RFP interviews.

Lastly, understand the implications of outsourcing customer service and its potential impact on customer satisfaction. Your brand is your calling card to your customers. Outsourcing should be an extension of your brand and a partner to your growth, not a hindrance to your continuous success.

2. Define your process and timeline

Every company is different; we've participated in RFP processes that take months and others that take 2-3 weeks. Shorter time frames typically indicate that the decision-makers already know who they want to work with, and the RFP is a formality. Ideally, budget at least 8-12 weeks for the entire decision-making process, from introductory calls to decision.

Here's a rough example of an RFP timeline:

Task	Start Date	End Date
Define objectives and draft the RFP	Week 1	Week 1
Research potential vendors	Week 2	Week 4
Hold introductory calls	Week 2	Week 4
Send out the RFP	Week 4	Week 4
Vendors submit questions	Week 5	Week 5
Provide written answers to vendor questions	Week 6	Week 6
Vendors submit RFP responses	Week 8	Week 8
Evaluate RFP responses	Week 9	Week 10
Hold follow-up calls with finalists	Week 11	Week 12
Make decision	Week 13	Week 13

Note that this doesn't even include time to negotiate a contract. Negotiating a contract can take months for enterprise clients, but even with smaller clients it takes about three weeks.

3. Draft the RFP

The RFP has two main components: details about your operation, and questions for the vendors.

Details about your operation should include:

- Ticket volume by channel. If support is provided by chat or phone, provide volume by interval
- Average handle time
- Target service levels
- Other KPIs, such as target Customer Satisfaction, Reponse Time, and First Contact Resolution
- Typical training timeline
- Tasks agents will need to complete
- Job description or overview of skills and experience required
- Current team size, including outsourced and/or in-house customer service agents
- Tech stack, including any technology you will rely on the vendor to provide

Ideally, you have provided this information to vendors ahead of time in your introductory calls, but even so it's helpful to confirm it in the RFP.

Questions for vendors should include everything you want to know about them, such as training programs, recruiting capabilities, operational structure, account management approach, security and compliance details, company culture, differentiators, and much more. We've included a complete template in Excel with more than 50 questions that you can use as a base for your own RFP.

You can download the template **here.**

About Peak Support

Peak Support is a customer service outsourcing company that provides exceptional quality and high-touch client management for the world's most innovative brands. We have 2,000 global employees serving clients in all industries, on teams ranging from 1 person to hundreds. We specialize in serving emerging or growing brands who need a high level of support.

Our services include customer support, technical support, content moderation, trust & safety, and back-office support. In addition, we partner with best-in-class CX software tools. Our Tech & AI Solutions department works closely with clients to optimize their existing tech stack or implement new technology.

We care about culture, because we believe that happy customer service agents deliver the best results. If you feel the same, **contact us today.**