



Empowering Community Clinics

A Manual for
Making Informed Technology Selection Decisions



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I. Introduction/Overview

In today's rapidly changing healthcare market, information has become essential to improving the efficiency and quality of patient care. The proliferation of the Internet has enabled many new health care information technologies to streamline clinical, administrative and operational activities.

Competing priorities, growing market competition and increasing budget constraints have made it challenging for community clinics to keep pace with information technology progress. To ensure that community clinics gain the same access to information tools as the private sector, the Tides Foundation, in partnership with the California Endowment, developed the Community Clinics Initiative (CCI).

A key part of strengthening information systems and enhancing infrastructure in community clinics is identifying and implementing the appropriate technologies to meet clinic-specific needs. To support this process, the Tides Foundation has asked CareScience, Inc., a leading provider of online care management services, to provide its Technology Assessment Tools to help clinics assess, select and procure information technologies. The Tides Foundation earmarked nearly \$20 million in grant money for participating clinics to upgrade their information technology systems. In order to qualify for the grant, the chosen technology had to be CareScience Certified.

The partnership with CareScience, which kicked-off in May 2000, included working with a Task Force comprised of clinic representatives to develop "Clinic Approved", a customized, specialty application to ensure that practice management system functionality meets clinic needs. Together with the CareScience Certified program, clinics had access to a comprehensive first level of due diligence for healthcare information technology selection. As of May 2002, when the contract between CareScience and the Tides Foundation expires, CareScience will no longer be providing the Technology Assessment Tools product line, including the CareScience certification program. CareScience Certification played an important role in guiding clinics toward viable information technologies that complied with industry-driven criteria. Although CareScience Certification will no longer be required for Tides Foundation grant funding, we encourage clinics to maintain the lessons learned from the technology assessment process in all future technology selection opportunities.

To continue its commitment to support community clinics in their technology selection processes, CareScience is providing this training manual. The intent is to empower community clinics to develop their own information technology strategies and conduct their own due diligence in assessing new technology to meet these strategies. This manual contains detailed information on the entire technology assessment process, from developing strategies to signing the contract. It includes references to the detailed company and product information that was previously available through Technology Assessment Tools. This Manual will assist you in making an appropriate, informed technology purchase that best meets your organizational requirements.

A. **Assessing Organizational Needs, Strategies and Risks**

Selecting a new information technology system is a major decision and investment for community clinics and deserves significant research and due diligence. It can have a significant impact on the way that an organization functions, with a direct impact on employees (users), clinicians and patients. The decision to purchase a new IT system is typically driven by one or more of the following needs or desires:

- Make a drastic change in business process
- Automate a manual or paper-based process
- Upgrade from an old legacy system that is no longer meeting your organization's needs or whose technology is out-of-date

Regardless of the reason, there should be a substantial business need to justify the investment. To ensure that the information technology meets all short and long-term aspects of the business strategy, the organization should conduct a thorough assessment of its business and technical strategy and operations. Since this is an investment of time, effort and resources as well as money, it is essential that clinics pursue this type of organizational introspection prior to making a significant investment in a new technology system.

A. Information Technology Strategic Planning

The Information Technology Strategic Plan should support the Organizational Strategic Plan by identifying key goals and issues within the organization and providing workable IT and process solutions to address them. A few important things to consider as part of the plan:

- Ensure that the solution enables scalable, standardized architectures that are upgradable and easily maintained;
- Protect the organization against obsolescence, increased costs due to redundancy and needless paper work.
- Account for the time and resources utilized for any project that impacts multiple functions in addition to the cost of the information technology.
- Prioritize people as part of the process: technology is only as good as the people that are using it, so provide for the continued education of staff in the use of technology.

Preparing an IT Strategic Plan involves the following steps:

Step 1 – Perform an Organizational Environment Assessment

First, conduct an assessment of overall non-technical needs and drivers of the organization that may impact IT selection decisions including but not limited to the following:

Goals established in the Corporate Strategic Plan

- What business goal(s) are you trying to accomplish?
- How can technology help the organization reach its stated goal(s)?
- Will the purchase of technology be part of the stated goal(s)?
- Can technology be used to facilitate implementation and efficiencies of the stated goal(s)?

User Requirements

- What is required by staff members to effectively do their jobs?

Customer Support

- How can we provide greater access, faster service and more information?

Decision Support Strategy

- Has the organization defined a set of standardized reports to be generated on a regularly scheduled basis for analysis?
- Can additional and ad hoc reports be run?
- Is there a strategy for ensuring that reports are being used?
- Is a description of the use and analysis of established reports available to users?

Communication Strategy

- Is there a strategy for improving communications internally (including across multiple sites) and externally?
- Is there adequate access to the Internet?
- Is the e-mail system adequate to meet communication requirements?
- Is the phone system adequate to meet communication requirements?
- Is there a strategy to protect against obsolescence?

Data Policies and Procedures

- Are adequate processes in place to protect the security, privacy and confidentiality of patient data?
- Data Collection – Define what to collect and which standards to support.
- Data Integrity – How will the organization maintain and enforce established data and procedure standards. (A plan for training often falls into this category.)
- Data Protection – Are policies and procedures for back ups and tape maintenance in place?
- Is there a strategy to protect against obsolescence?

Step 2 - Technical Environment Assessment

As a part of creating an Information Technology Strategic Plan and a crucial step in researching information systems, perform an assessment of the systems and technology currently in place in the organization. Understanding what systems already exist will enable a better understanding of the current IT position and what will be involved in meeting organizational goals with technology.

See Appendix A for an Assessment Worksheet to help you get started.

Using the completed Assessment Worksheet, conduct an assessment of your organization's technical environment and capabilities including but not limited to the following:

IT Cost Effectiveness

- Identify areas where information technology could reduce redundancy, needless paperwork and ease the quest for information.

Technology Standards

- Does the organization use accepted industry standards (ANSI, HL7, XML, etc.)?
- Plan for scalable, standardized architectures.

Data Processing

- Identify areas of weakness in the overall processing of data within the organization. Assess the strengths, weakness, opportunities and risks of your current vendors and systems (Practice Management, EMR, etc.).
- Are there technologies available that could be used to integrate current systems and sites?
- Are there processes being performed within the organization that could be moved from paper to electronic solutions (supply chain ordering, claims submission, eligibility checking, automatic remittance, reminder calls, etc.)?

Application Strategy

- Are you supporting applications performing duplicate functions?
- Is there a process established to determine who needs access to what? (By department, function, etc.) Is this documented?
- Is there a strategy to protect against obsolescence?

Integration Strategy

- Are you performing redundant tasks in more than one system?
- What technologies are available to integrate products that need to share information?

Desktop Strategy

- Are you using a standard configuration for desktop solutions?
- Is security provided and enforced at the desktop level?
- Are policy and procedures needed?
- Is there a strategy to protect against obsolescence?

Information System Staffing

- Describe the tasks and talent of each individual.
- Identify the department's strengths and weaknesses.
- What skills or additional personnel are needed to improve service to the organization?

Step 3 - Assessing Opportunities for Change

Based upon what the answers to the previous questions reveal about the organization, determine where opportunities exist for increasing efficiencies to improve care and reduce costs. Also determine whether implementing technology can lead to overall business changes beyond the original business plan, for example, reaching a new market segment or extending business hours.

Increasing Efficiencies

- What processes can be improved through the introduction of new/updated technology?
- What other benefits will new technology yield? For example, implementing an electronic medical record may free up office space, previously used as a file room, for another exam room.

Emerging Technologies Strategy

- Is there a strategy for investigating, evaluating and implementing emerging technologies to strengthen and/or extend the business plan?

Step 4 - Assess Risks of New Technologies versus Risks of Status Quo

As part of the strategic planning process, it is necessary to assess the risks of implementing new technologies as well as the risks of not implementing new technologies. One important fact about technology is that it can rapidly become obsolete. Giant strides are continually being made in technology, which poses one of the biggest risks to the decision at hand. Hence, evaluating this risk as part of the planning process is very important.

Including plans for upgrading technology on a regular basis will help to mitigate the obsolescence risk. The alternative of not implementing new technologies may pose a greater risk if the cost of performing a necessary business requirement with the status quo exceeds doing so with upgraded technology. For instance, the time and resources consumed by a manual billing/claims processing process or by keeping up with required reporting for community health centers may exceed the cost of implementing a billing or reporting system and conducting these transactions and business requirements electronically. If a system were unable to keep up with such requirements it would be a great risk to not update the technology.

By including all potential risks within the strategic plan, you are better able to prioritize organizational IT goals. It will also help to define requirements for the new technology during the product research process.

B. Developing the Plan

When the above questions are answered, a formal IT strategic plan can be created through the following steps:

- Create a mission statement for the IT plan.
- Prioritize the critical IT issues facing the organization.
- Separate short-term goals from long-term goals.
- Document the answers to all of the above questions (as applicable to the organization) as they relate to each goal.
- Create an action plan that summarizes what information technologies to pursue.
- Summarize the Action Plan and consider the following questions: Can multiple goals/issues be resolved by a single technological implementation/improvement? What has the best potential return on investment (ROI)?

A sample format of an IT Strategic Plan has been provided as Appendix B.

Community Health Centers, like other small organizations or businesses, should include the following, at a minimum, in the IT Strategic Plan:

- Hardware and software purchases and upgrades
- Training and education
- Technical and user support
- System maintenance
- Implementation
- Integration

C. Creating a Work Plan

The work plan is the tactical result of the Action plan and should set steady, realistic, short-term (3 month) milestones to pursuing the goals and issues as summarized. These milestones should include measurable tasks and associated deadlines assigned to accountable resources and progress should be updated on a regular basis (e.g., weekly).

III. Information Technology Considerations

This section describes the important considerations that a community clinic should know regarding assessing relevant health information technology systems. It is by no means a comprehensive list, but rather it contains the basic information to start you in the right direction.

A. Basic Systems for Office Administration and Clinical Delivery

The following are the common system types used by community health centers (CHCs). The functionality of these systems allows CHCs the greatest opportunity to gain cost efficiencies and care effectiveness. These systems will automate the most common tasks, maintain fundamental data, run required reports, improve clinical workflow and allow for comprehensive analysis of the patient population for improved access, increased advocacy, etc.

Practice Management System – An automated system to manage the functions of a medical office. Typical functionality includes patient scheduling, patient registration and demographic data, patient tracking and follow-up, billing, eligibility, claims processing and reporting.

Electronic Medical Record (EMR) – Also called Computerized Patient Record (CPR) - A computer-based patient record including medical chart, health history, lab tests and results, patient reminders, and medication management. These have expanded recently to include such functionality as decision support tools, master patient indices, patient education tools, and eligibility verification. Most EMRs are enterprise-based systems. However, patient information tends to exist at multiple healthcare organizations in a given city, county, state, region, etc. For this reason, it is important to understand how extensible the EMR is and whether it provides the clinician with the most comprehensive view of the patient.

Population Health Management – An automated system to integrate and coordinate care to improve clinical outcomes which can in turn reduce healthcare costs. This method encompasses all aspects of healthcare delivery, particularly disease management.

B. Methods of Application Delivery

There are a variety of methods by which an application can be delivered to an end-user. Many applications can be distributed using different types of delivery methods. These need to be thoroughly evaluated in order to ensure that the purchased product's delivery method adequately meets the organization's needs. Delivery methods include the following:

Application Service Provider (ASP) – Vendors of ASP applications deliver and manage applications and computer services from remote data centers to multiple users via the Internet or a private network. In essence, the ASP model is like having the same program for use without maintaining the support and maintenance costs on the organization payroll which can be quite expensive for today's technology. It allows the fixed costs of hardware, software and staff to be shared across several installations, thus lowering the start-up and operating cost for any organization. The ASP leases the use of the application and associated hardware to its customers. ASP customers are able to control more precisely the total cost of technology ownership through scheduled payment schemes. This shifts much of the IT burden to a third party so that your organization can better focus on core competencies. With an ASP the organization will typically need to provide users with terminals that have network and/or Internet access and a standard Web browser. Thereby minimizing on-site IT maintenance and upgrade costs.

Client-Server – This application delivery method distributes computing between a dedicated computer (server) and smaller computers (clients). The client and server communicate with each other over a

network. The client depends on the server for file and data storage, programs and processing. The client computers can range from machines with little processing power (thin client) to fully powered fat clients depending on how much of the processing is done by the server.

C. Other Important Considerations

Security

There are various methods and levels of security available in health information technology products. The following is an overview of the most common:

- **User names and passwords**: This method may be sufficient for an enterprise-only system but, by itself, is inadequate to protect confidential patient information when transmitted over the Internet. Such a method is too easily compromised and will not comply with HIPAA standards. More reliable methods involve processes such as authentication or cryptography.
- **Authentication**: The process by which a computer verifies that the users are who they say they are. There are various methods of authentication, including hardware or software approaches. The hardware model includes smartcards, password tokens and biometric scanners. The software model is based upon a user's digital identity.
- **Cryptography**: The process that uses mathematical algorithms to provide authentication, non-repudiation and integrity of electronically transmitted data. The most common type of cryptography is Public Key Infrastructure (PKI). PKI uses a pair of keys (a public key and a private key) as the basis to encrypt and decrypt information as well as to provide digital signatures/certificates. The public key can only be decrypted using the corresponding private key. The private key is carefully protected so that only the owner can decrypt messages. The public key, however, is distributed freely so that anyone can encrypt messages intended for the owner. Secure Socket Layers (SSL) is a PKI protocol that provides secure connections by allowing two applications connecting over a network connection to authenticate each other's identity by encrypting the data exchanged between the applications.

Security features can be program/application specific or can be accessed at a higher network/infrastructure level. The organization will need to decide at what level security protocols; i.e. authentication of an individual user takes place. It is often necessary to have such protocols in place at BOTH the network and application levels.

When implementing or upgrading a new information system, keep in mind that many products can be purchased with appropriate security already in place. This can often be the best solution for an organization in terms of price and convenience.

Implementation

An integral part of purchasing an IT system involves the implementation of the system into the facility(s). It is important to plan for the several facets of implementation ahead of time to minimize unforeseen problems/events by planning for the following:

- **Installation**. The installation of the product (hardware and software, as appropriate). This is typically done by the vendor or an agreed upon third party. It is important to specify exactly who is responsible for the installation in the RFP and the contract.
- **Integration**. Is this product going to interact with any other software/hardware within or external to the organization? For example, will the new practice management system be linked to the accounting system for automated transfer of data? Or perhaps a third party reporting tool will be used to run reports. If so, an interface may need to be created between the products. In some instances an

Interface Engine could act as a go-between to accurately transfer the data from one application to another. If the new product will require some type of integration, make sure that the cost for this service is budgeted for and that all parties involved are aware of the plan ahead of time. Third party integrators may be required to work with your vendor. Project plans should be updated regularly to ensure that all parties are aware of delays in scheduling, etc.

- **Data conversion.** If you are transitioning from a legacy system to a new system, the organization needs to decide what and how much data from the legacy system will be loaded into the new system. For some organizations it may be best to start fresh, as the data in the legacy system may be corrupt or outdated. If cleaning up the data is too labor intensive and/or costly, then it may not make sense to pursue data conversion. Some data may be salvageable. The patient demographic data may be clean enough to move into the new system to minimize patient disruption and excessive data entry. This is fairly common for practice management upgrades. The financial and billing data are often compromised or “dirty” and may not be appropriate to upload to the new system. Furthermore, some new systems may be unable to accept data from the legacy system (or some legacy systems may be unable to adequately download data for upload into new system). In this case it is necessary to plan for the possibility of having to do a considerable amount of data entry prior to going live with the new system. Asking the right questions in an RFP will inform your organization ahead of time of your data conversion options/limitations. Regardless of the situation, data conversion is another important decision that should be decided as part of the contract to avoid additional cost).
- **Training.** No system implementation would be complete without training the staff to use the new technology. Besides simply attending a training session, allow adequate time for users of the new system to become accustomed to navigating the new software and understanding the data requirements for each field. Walking each user through test scenarios aligned with their respective roles will make them more comfortable with the new system before going live with real data and real patients/clients.

Maintenance and Technical Support

Some vendors offer different levels of service depending upon an organization’s operational needs. Ensure that you select the appropriate level of service, documenting the hours of coverage, turnaround time, dedicated support staff (if applicable), etc. in the contract as well as what recourse exists if you do not receive the level of service agreed to.

Build vs. Buy

A topic that sometimes arises during technology assessment is whether or not your organization should build its own application rather than making a (potentially) sizable investment in a commercially available product. With a market flush with different types of systems to meet a variety of needs and increased industry emphasis on integration across multiple organizations the cost and difficulty involved in building a “homegrown” system is likely to exceed long-term benefits. In order to build a robust, long-lasting and extensible system, the following should be taken into consideration:

- **Staffing.** Software development requires a full complement of software developers, QA analysts, project managers, database administrators, etc., not just system administrators. Typically such specialty staff are not on the personnel roster of a community health center. It is possible that the software staff would outnumber the clinical and administrative personnel.
- **Time and Difficulty.** There would be considerably more time needed for requirements gathering in order to build your own system rather than purchasing one. Software development is a time consuming process and would probably take years before the process is ‘finished’.

- On-going Costs. Given the maintenance required to upkeep and upgrade the product, building a homegrown system becomes a continuous process. Hence, where support resources are typically shared across an install-base of a commercial product, dedicated and knowledgeable resources would be necessary for the life of the product.

IV. Researching Products

There are some common issues to consider when researching vendors and their products including, but not limited to, the following:

A. Vendor

A software contract is, in many respects, a partnership between the vendor and the purchaser (clinic). If the vendor were to go out of business the partnership would be dissolved. Then there would be no upgrades, technical or user support, etc. Therefore, it is important to evaluate the company providing the product/service along some of the following factors:

- **Financial Viability.** Public companies will provide you with a copy of their financial documents. Private companies are not required to do so, but ask anyway. A failure to produce financial documents may be an attempt to hide a struggling company.
- **Mission and History.** Company demographics and the mission statement will reveal a lot about the company and their dedication to the customer.
- **Industry Involvement.** Is the organization a member of any industry or standards organizations (e.g. HIMSS or HL7)? Although not a necessary factor, this may demonstrate their commitment to industry improvement.
- **Customer-focused Culture.** The company culture can also help paint a picture of the vendor organization and how understanding they are of customer needs. Do not be afraid to ask any question.

B. Product Technology

When assessing the technology and architecture of a product it is important that it appropriately fits in with your organization's IT Strategic Plan. For example, if the Strategic Plan is moving towards outsourcing IT functions than it would be best to look for a product whose architecture best supports an ASP model. If there are no major limitations in the Strategic Plan regarding a product's architecture then it is best to look at all options and make decisions based on other factors of greater importance to the organization.

The next step in evaluating a product's technology is to determine whether the architecture is appropriate for the functions you are asking it to perform. Will the database be able to handle the dataset that your organization will be storing? Is it flexible enough to grow with your business and include possible future functionality? Can the product handle a sufficient number of users and transactions? Will it be able to integrate/interface with current/future systems?

In an effort to answer these questions, CareScience created CareScience Certification™ to help healthcare organizations evaluate Internet-enabled healthcare technologies and distinguish among technology products that meet security standards and have the flexibility to interface with complementary systems. The program was developed in collaboration with The California HealthCare Foundation and offers objective product appraisals and a shortlist for technology selection.

Through a voluntary online certification application, CareScience has collected over 300 data points on each company and product based on the following criteria:

- **Use of Industry Standards and Security Practices** - The product must protect privacy, security, and confidentiality; support current authorization and access control mechanisms; and conform to healthcare industry and Internet transmission standards.
- **Internet-enabled Technology** - The product's technical architecture must support Internet-enabled applications and product functionality must be accessible through industry standard Web browsers.
- **Interoperability** - The product must be standards-based and have the capacity to exchange data with Internet-enabled products from other companies. The exchange of data should require, at most, minor interface work effort.
- **Product Efficacy and Proven Capability** - The product must be functioning in a real-world environment and must be supported by sufficient user documentation, training and technical support.

Upon submitting an online application, CareScience performed an unbiased review of each technology company's application data, audited answers to key questions, and contacted customer references. This resulted in more than 280 product submissions and 100 products certified. The detailed company and product information that was collected for certification will continue to be available for viewing through the Tides Foundation Community Clinics Initiative Extranet. It is important to remember that this information is no longer being updated and may not accurately reflect the state of a company or product. It is critical that the organization obtains updated company and product information during the RFP process and perform the necessary due diligence in assessing technology products.

Detailed company and product information for CareScience Certified products is available on the Tides Foundation Community Clinics Initiative Extranet at www.communityclinics.org.

C. Product Functionality

When looking at product functionality, be very specific with regards to what features you view as required in an application, nice to have, and not needed (this way you may not have to pay extra for functionality that you will not be using). This should include a detailed list of reports (if applicable) that you run regularly to see whether they are standard reports, ad hoc reports, require a third-party reporting tool or cannot be run from the application. Be sure to inquire about what additional functionality (beyond what you have requested) is available with the product or with additional modules.

A sample checklist, created by the Bureau of Primary Healthcare, listing functional requirements of a clinical practice management system is available as a reference through Tides Foundation Community Clinics Initiative Extranet at www.communityclinics.org.

When looking at the overall features and function of the product, it should, at a minimum, agree with the statements below, as applicable:

Usability

- The user interface is logical and intuitive to use.
- The product functions as an enterprise system where data is seamless across modules and does not require redundant data entry.
- The product allows the end-user to appropriately access patient records or data such as allowing a single user to access multiple records at the same time or multiple users to access the same record simultaneously.
- The product enables remote access from multiple sites.
- The product supports several industry accepted and commercially available accessories and peripherals.

Training and Support

- User training is available to optimize user adoption.
- Up-to-date user documentation is available to optimize user adoption and learning.
- User support is available to optimize user productivity.
- Maintenance and technical support is available to maintain product availability and usability.
- All support and training is provided in a reasonably accessible and timely manner.

Reporting Requirements

- The product meets federal and state reporting requirements.
- The company will be responsive and provide product updates to meet changes to federal and state reporting requirements in a timely manner (before mandated date)
- The product allows the ability for custom reporting with basic user proficiency and without vendor intervention.
- The product allows flexibility to customize data elements without vendor intervention with basic user proficiency.
- The product allows the tracking and reporting on custom defined fields.
- The product supports/interfaces with third-party report-writing software.
- The company provides documentation of how data elements are tracked and enumerated.
- The product is able to track and report data elements on individual patients such as unduplicated patient counts and patient visits.

System Capability

- The product was developed to accommodate community health centers and meets their system requirements.
- The product meets federal and state billing requirements.
- The company will be responsive and provide product updates to meet changes to federal and state billing requirements in a timely manner.
- The product is scalable and flexible to meet the changing clinic environment.
- The product enables fluid integration across modules.
- The product does not require the customer to purchase or support an inordinate amount of specific proprietary systems and technologies.
- The product has the ability to exchange data with other products.
- The product is stable and supports maximum up time.
- The product is manageable and maintainable.
- The product supports a unique patient identifier.
- The product runs at the appropriate speed and performance standards to enable workflow efficiency.

In addition to CareScience Certification, a special evaluation of practice management system software called the “Clinic Approved” application was designed for community health centers. Clinic Approved criteria are based on the following product areas:

- Usability
- Training and support
- System capabilities
- Reporting

Products that met clinic requirements and CareScience Certification were among a shortlist of products that could be purchased by participating clinics with funds from the Tides Foundation. The detailed

practice management product information that was collected for Clinic Approval will continue to be available for viewing through the Tides Foundation Community Clinics Initiative Extranet. It is important to remember that this information is no longer being updated and may not accurately reflect the state of a product. It is critical that the organization obtains updated company and product information during the RFP process and perform the necessary due diligence in assessing technology products.

Detailed Clinic Approval applications are available through the Tides Foundation Community Clinics Initiative Extranet at www.communityclinics.org.

This training manual was created to assist community health centers with the software selection due diligence process and empower them to create their own shortlist of appropriate technology products. As a result, CareScience Certification and Clinic Approval are no longer prerequisites for Tides Foundation grant funding proposals. A due diligence statement is now required to accompany these proposals. This statement will demonstrate to Tides that the appropriate organizational assessment and software selection research was completed by the requesting organization.

A copy of the Technology Assessment - Due Diligence Statement has been provided as Appendix C.

V. Request for Proposal

Conducting a thorough Request for Proposal (RFP) process before selecting a technology vendor/product is equally as important as performing a comprehensive needs assessment prior to beginning the technology selection process. The RFP process can help ensure that the product meets the organization's requirements, there are no hidden costs/fees and everything that is promised is delivered/installed. Taking the time to perform the due diligence of asking the right questions prior to sitting down at the contract table is critical to establishing a mutually beneficial relationship with the software vendor.

The RFP serves many different functions in the technology selection process, but above all, should serve as a first line of due diligence and not the last word with a vendor prior to contract. A proper RFP process will, at a minimum, meet the following goals:

- Explain your organization's current IT status and future direction to the technology vendor.
- Detail the specific requirements that a technology product has to satisfy to meet the organization's needs.
- Allow the vendor adequate knowledge of your organization to make informed recommendations regarding how their product can best suit your organization's needs.
- Disclose the proposed pricing structure for the requested product (and possibly for alternative solutions that the vendor recommends). This pricing can be negotiated at a later date, but the RFP serves as a good starting point for such negotiations as well as understanding the structure the vendor uses for pricing (e.g., how the pricing is determined, what is included in basic pricing, what costs extra, etc.).
- Serve as a tool to adequately compare different products/vendors against each other on a level playing field (compare apples to apples).
- When included as an addendum to the signed contract, the RFP will help ensure your organization receives the product/solution that was described in the RFP. That is, the RFP will provide insurance that the product will live up to the descriptions that were provided in the vendor's RFP responses.

A. The RFP Process

A RFP serves as a formal invitation to bid on products/services for a vendor and an information gathering process for the clinic. It should be thorough, clear and concise in order to be most effective. Vague, open-ended questions will often yield insufficient answers, so be specific without going beyond an appropriate level of questioning to accomplish the above-stated goals. View the RFP as a way to create equality among vendors to enable a more detailed and educated evaluation of the product.

The completed proposal will also serve as written documentation of the services to be performed by the selected vendor. It is essential that the RFP include all of the necessary information to allow the vendor to adequately assess your organization's current technical status (including pros and cons of current or legacy system), future IT and organizational plans and goals of this RFP.

The RFP Process includes the following steps:

1. Develop Requirements
2. Write RFP
3. Release RFP
4. Hold Bidder's Conference or Question and Answer period (optional)
5. Receive Proposals

6. Evaluate Proposal Responses
7. Create Shortlist

1. Develop Requirements

As previously discussed, this first step is essential to preparing a RFP as well as to the entire technology selection process. The organization must understand its overall business strategy and requirements, overall technical strategy and requirements and, specific business and technical requirements as they pertain to this RFP. For more information on developing these requirements refer to Section II.

2. Write RFP

Once the business and technical requirements gathering is completed, a RFP can be drafted. There are many different ways to create a RFP. Typically a RFP is an MS Word (or similar) type document. Other document types may be used (e.g. MS Excel, MS Access) which may make it easier to compare proposal responses later on.

The RFP is divided into sections. A typical RFP will include the following information:

- **Introduction** – Describe your organization including the following: Organizational structure, office/clinic locations, size (number of employees, users, physicians, covered lives, etc.), demographics, mission, market focus, objectives/scope of the RFP, Executive Summary.
- **Description** – Provide a detailed description of the project. Include the following: current IT system specifications (architecture/platform/hardware/software), required functionality, preferred system architecture/platform/delivery method, interface specifications, integration needs, training, support, maintenance and performance requirements, etc.
- **RFP Specifications** – Describe how the RFP process works. Include the following: required submission format, delivery name and address, number of copies requested, letter of intent (optional), ownership of proposal information, timeline of proposal events (due date, evaluation dates, proposed project start date, etc), evaluation criteria, and bidder's conference or vendor question period (optional).
- **Technical proposal** – Pose questions to the vendor. See next section for detailed information on the technical proposal.
- **Cost proposal** – Request the proposed pricing/costs for all of the requested services. A properly designed cost proposal will break down costs as much as possible to guarantee that there will be no hidden costs/fees and all requested services are included. Rather than just requesting pricing information, it may be beneficial to create a table for the vendor to complete in order to break down the price according to your specifications (although for some vendors pricing may be bundled or specified differently.). It also facilitates comparing the submitted pricing between vendors. The most important factor is making sure that the clinic organization understands all costs involved for the above outlined requirements.
- **Appendices** – Include any additional information that may be relevant to a vendor in completing the RFP.

It is easy to simply copy questions from a previously 'used' RFP or from a RFP template into your own RFP. While using such documents can be very helpful in organizing your RFP and reminding you of important questions that may have been omitted otherwise, it is important that you take the time to create an RFP that best suits your organization's needs. This document will represent your organization to the vendors. It is important to make a good impression, but it is even more important to ask all of the right questions.

Sample RFPs/RFP templates are available for reference through the Tides Foundation Community Clinics Initiative Extranet at www.communityclinics.org.

Technical Proposal

Be sure to ask relevant questions coinciding with your organization's requirements. Sample questions for key topics are provided below.

- **Vendor Information** – Is the company owned by another organization? What is the company's mission statement? How many employees? Describe the history of the company. What is the ownership structure? Include most recent financial statements. Are there any pending lawsuits or legal actions against your company?
- **General Information** – Will any third parties be involved in delivering any part of the requested product and/or service? If so who are they and what will they be providing? Provide three (or more) current customer references. (Request client references with similar type and size facility, preferably in close proximity to your own facility).
- **Product Development** – How many developers are dedicated to this product? How many years of experience do they have?
- **Product Implementation** – Describe implementation methodology. How long is average implementation? Include a sample implementation schedule/plan. How many sites have been implemented? Include biographies of the team that would handle this implementation.
- **User Training/Support** – Is on-site user training available? Is it included in the pricing? What is the pricing model for additional training sessions (both on-site and off-site)? Is User Support available? What are the hours? What is the cost?
- **Technical Support** – What are the available methods for Technical Support? What are the available hours? What are average hold times? What is the average time to resolution? Is support available for all users or only certain users (e.g. help desk personnel)?
- **Product Architecture** – Describe your product's architecture. What are the minimum requirements to operate your product? What additional hardware/software is needed? What is the programming language? What database is used?
- **Interoperability** – Are HL7 standard interfaces included with the product? What tools are available for extending or customizing the product's capabilities to interoperate?
- **Scalability** – Has the product been stress tested? If so what is the maximum number of users? Has the product been volume tested? If so what is the maximum number of transactions?
- **Security** – Is the product HIPAA compliant? How is the privacy and confidentiality of patient information ensured? Are passwords encrypted? Does the product maintain an audit log of all accesses to confidential information?
- **Contracting Information** – Will you include the RFP as an addendum to the contract? Include a sample contract. Can we use our own contract? Are you willing to provide a service level agreement as an addendum to the contract?

3. Release RFP

The RFP has been sent out to the vendors. Now what? There is still much preparation to be done during this time. Make sure that you keep on top of the timeline that was laid out in the RFP. While the vendors are reviewing the RFP, it is a perfect time to create an evaluation tool for the completed proposals. One method of evaluation is to create a spreadsheet listing the vendors' name as the column headers and key questions for comparison as row headers. This is filled in as the proposals are reviewed, thereby keeping all of the relevant information in one place. See example below. Other methods can be effective also. Use what you are most comfortable with but not something that will require an overwhelming amount of work to create and update.

Key Question	Product 1	Product 2	Product 3	Product 4
Do you provide on-site training	Yes	No	Yes, additional cost	Yes
Required Client Operating System	Windows 2000/XP	Windows 95/98/NT/200/XP, MacOS, Unix	Windows NT/2000	Proprietary OS
Key Question 3				

4. Hold Bidder's Conference or Question and Answer Period

It may also be necessary to plan for the bidder's conference (if one was arranged for in the RFP). A bidder's conference allows the vendors to send representatives to a meeting in which questions regarding the RFP are answered. A logistically easier alternative to the bidder's conference is a question and answer period. Allow the vendors to submit RFP-related questions by a certain deadline, as set forth in the RFP. All of these questions are then answered and a copy of all questions and answers are sent to all vendors. Sending all questions and answers to all vendors ensures that there is a level playing field. Be sure to schedule either the Q&A period or the bidder's conference early in the process to give enough time for vendor's to complete the proposal.

5. Receive Proposals

Keep track of when the proposals are received by the clinic. Vendors should be able to meet a realistic deadline.

6. Evaluate Proposal Responses

Once all of the RFPs have been received it is time to review the responses. Start by reading all of the proposals and completing the evaluation tool. Although price is always a key factor in determining which product your organization can purchase, it is more important to find a product that has the best fit for features, function and technology. There is always room to negotiate on price if the product is a perfect match. Also it is possible that spending a little bit more up front on the 'right' product will yield a greater and quicker return on investment (ROI). For example purchasing a less expensive product that does not adequately meet your requirements may lead to a major change in work flow, productivity and business practices as a result. These may cost your organization more in the long run.

Still, it is possible that the 'perfect' product may be priced well out of your budget, even with grants and other outside funding. In that case, perhaps the product can be purchased one module at a time and implemented over a period of time to distribute the financial burden over a few years. Or perhaps some features are not necessary and you can save money by not implementing a module (be careful not to overbuy). If the price is just out of the question, take what you have learned about this 'perfect' product and see how well the runner's up can compare. Perhaps the runner-up product can equally meet your needs but has fewer bells and whistles. This may be acceptable at a considerable cost savings. The bells and whistles may also be coming in a future release (if they promise something to you in a future release, be sure to get it in writing in the contract with a delivery date and a penalty if the feature is late).

7. Create Shortlist

From the proposal evaluation step you can narrow your list down to a few potential products. This is a good time to check the client references that were provided for each product on the shortlist. It may even help you decide whether a product stays on the shortlist or is removed from consideration. Before contacting any of the references you should prepare the following:

1. A standard list of questions to ask all references. These standard questions will allow for a fair comparison. The questions you ask should address all of your key requirements to find out how well the product can meet your needs in a real life environment.
2. Specific questions you have for each product on the short list. Perhaps a response in the RFP was not totally clear or was vague as to whether it would meet your needs. If applicable, you can talk the reference through the question and see if this was an issue for them.
3. During your conversation with the reference, feel free to delve further into any point or to ask other questions that may arise. Make sure you ask all of the questions on your list, but do not be constrained to the question list. Be sure to take detailed notes of your conversations with the references, as the technology assessment team should evaluate this information.

B. Product Demonstrations

Before selecting a product you need to see it in action. Get a feel for the user interface, the screens and the workflow. Witness the processing speed, features and functionality first hand and in the deployment model your organization would be purchasing (i.e., over the Internet if an ASP). This can involve a product demonstration (typically conducted by the vendor) and/or a site visit (at the site of a customer already using the product).

Developing Demo Questions:

By taking the time to identify exactly what you want, you will more readily be able to compare similarities and differences among products and ensure that each area of your organization supports the final decision to contract with a company.

The contract manager or project manager should use this preliminary step to develop the methodology within the company that will provide future structured feedback and buy-in as this process will be repeated during the contract negotiations phase.

Form a brainstorming group to develop a list of questions specific to your company. The group should be comprised of one or more representatives from each department that will be involved in the decision making and use of the product. Research and review information on the prospective company. Some possible resources may include, but are not limited to the following:

- Federal, State, Local reporting requirements
- RFI and RFP
- Product literature
- Press releases
- Neutral product reviews
- Interfaces
- Data Conversion
- Unique Functionality needs of users
- Administrative
- Clinical
- Consumer Empowerment
- Data Management
- Services
- Networking and Hosting
- Support
- Training

Develop a list of value statements from your brainstorming group that addresses the specific needs and concerns of each department, decision-makers, etc. Next, categorize and rank each value statement by assigning a weight to its importance. Once this process has been completed, develop questions that you would like the company to address during the product demonstration.

Using Scenarios:

Another good method used to evaluate a company's capability is to incorporate business scenarios into your product demonstration questions. Take the time to develop real case scenarios based on your current operational issues. You may either provide these scenarios to the health information technology company in advance or use them as a framework for the demo discussion. Ask the company to walk you through their system functionality in response to your scenario, then evaluate the response.

- Is the response realistic?
- Can the company show you how the product will provide a solution?
- Does the proposed solution meet your core value statements?
- How much does the solution affect your current practices?
- How much customization is required and which party will be responsible for customization?

Individual Demo

Invite an individual company to present a demo of their product at the clinic's site. An in-depth demo generally may take between four and eight hours depending on the product and the level of detail the clinic is expecting. Generally, an RFP and RFI has already been completed and reviewed. The clinic should outline the issues they want to see addressed by the company prior to the demonstration. All key decision-makers and expert personnel affected by this new product should be in attendance for the demonstration.

Pros:

- Allows clinic to evaluate and discuss detailed functionality.
- Allows clinic users to evaluate usability by actually using the system.
- Allows clinic and company to clearly define customization requirements or agreement terms.
- Establishes company/client relationship in intimate business to business setting.

Cons:

- Demonstration can be too sales oriented with little concrete functionality if pre-planning is not thorough and expectations formalized.
- Can pose time constraints and scheduling conflicts if wide arrays of companies are being considered.
- Requires that the audience remain static for decision-making purposes.

Multi-Product Demo

A multi-product demo relies on the clinic's ability to provide the time and resources to meet the needs of a multiple-day, client hosted demonstration. Two to three companies are invited to the clinic's site to provide demonstrations and implementation strategies in a two to five day window. Depending on resources, companies may be invited to participate simultaneously or at different times. At the end of three days, each company is expected to present an implementation plan and product demonstration with actual client data elements.

Pros:

- Allows clinics to evaluate quality of implementation that addressed specific scenarios.
- Allows clinics to observe and evaluate communication and teamwork.
- Allows clinics to address specific functionality issues.
- Allows clinics to observe how difficult any customization requirements may be.
- Allows clinics an opportunity to review training and documentation material.

Cons:

- Administratively time consuming requiring dedicated staff to each company present.
- If conducted on-site, requires space to 'house' each company.
- Not recommended if wide arrays of companies are being considered.

C. Site Visits

Company Site Visits:

Site visits to the health information technology company's office should be a mandatory step in your evaluation process. This is your opportunity to meet the personnel that will be providing you service and not just the sales people that you met at the product demonstration. Note how well you get along with these personnel?

Client Site Visits:

Interview the companies other clients by phone and ideally schedule a site visit. Observe the similarities and differences in your business. Listen to what the client has to say about the company. What issues arose during implementation? Ask the company what advice they have to give you in terms of a contract with the company. Are there issues that have been identified that you should address in the contract?

VI. Contracting

This section contains general information intended to help clinics navigate through the contracting steps for software purchases. **This information is not a substitute for legal advice. Legal counsel should review and participate in all contract negotiations.**

A. Contracting Basics

Contracting is a critical step in making an information technology software/hardware purchase. A well-executed contract will help ensure that:

- the system will be appropriately implemented
- all functionality is installed and functioning appropriately
- all parties are aware of their roles and responsibilities
- the staff are adequately trained on the system
- technical and/or user support is available as expected
- upgrades are delivered/installed on time
- additional costs are kept to a minimum
- the organization has a means of recourse (legal and otherwise) if contractual requirements are not met

Since the purchase of an IT solution typically begins a long, ongoing relationship with the IT vendor, it is extremely important to negotiate a fair agreement with the IT vendor from the start. Upgrades, defects/bugs, changes in regulations (e.g. HIPAA), etc. all lead to the need for a continuous relationship with the vendor. The contract, together with a service level agreement, can protect the healthcare organization from having to pay exorbitant amounts of money for future upgrades/fixes to bring the application into compliance with new regulations.

Many healthcare organizations negotiate contracts with companies to address the areas of procurement, implementation and conversion. However, the area of ongoing contract management is often overlooked or underdeveloped in the body of the contract. It is recommended that you negotiate a separate Service Level Agreement to cover maintenance, outsourced services, etc. or attach a Service Level Agreement to the contract in the form of an addendum.

Whenever possible, use your "boilerplate" agreement. Do not accept the vendor's boilerplate agreement as a starting point. If necessary, you may then negotiate clauses, contract language and the scope of the agreement based on *your* original contract. Using your standard agreement accomplishes two objectives: first, your legal counsel has the opportunity to prepare a contract that supports the organization's goals and protects your interests in the relationship; second, by working from an existing template, you can greatly reduce the amount of time and resources devoted to establishing an agreement.

B. Elements of a Software Contract:

There are some essential topics to consider when negotiating a software contract including, but not limited to, the following:

- **Scope and terms:** Identify the parties to the contract, the product(s)/services to be performed and by whom, duration of contractual obligations (including a start date), etc.
- **Licensing agreement:** Define the licensing terms. Who the users are, how many users, limitations of use, duration, renewals, etc. In the event that the vendor should go out of business or stop supporting the software product, ensure that your organization receives a copy of the source code. If the vendor

is reluctant to turn over the source code, it can be placed in escrow for the duration of the contract. Make sure that the source code in escrow is updated as often as the software is.

- **Payment terms:** When payments are due, how much is due at each interval, penalties for late payments, etc. Be sure to include all billable elements (hardware, software, interfaces, customization, conversion, training, maintenance upgrades, travel and other expenses, etc.). It is best to link payments to crucial milestones, with a significant portion of the payment reserved for the system being fully operational. This is also a good time to negotiate future renewal rates.
- **Specifications:** Define the requirements, functionality and customizations that are to be delivered. Include delivery dates and penalties for delays. Be sure to specify performance requirements (processing speed, response time, system availability, etc.) as well. Typically a work plan is provided to define the timelines for product implementation and delivery. It is a good idea to link the first payment with receipt of an agreed upon work plan. Also include the RFP as an addendum to the contract. This will help ensure that the organization gets what it was promised.
- **Installation:** Define party(s) responsible for installation of all components of the new technology, pricing, timeframe, penalties, etc. This information should also be part of the work plan.
- **Compliance:** Ensure in writing that the product adheres to any compliance standards that are required by the organization, e.g., Y2K, HIPAA, HL7.
- **Training:** Define the training methodology, required documentation, scope and frequency of training sessions, number of users and pricing for additional training.
- **Support:** Define support methodology, staffing levels, hours of operation/availability, and pricing. Ensure that support is provided during the clinic's regular hours of operation.
- **Testing:** Define the terms of user acceptance testing (these are tests done on the installed product to verify that it is functioning properly and that all functionality and converted data are available).
- **Warranties:** Define what is covered under warranty (all vendor provided hardware and software should be warranted), for how long, parties responsible for resolving defects/bugs, limitations on damage and problem/dispute resolution procedures. Require the vendor to maintain liability insurance. If the vendor cannot complete a functional installation (passing user acceptance testing), the contract should allow for a full refund.

Additional contracting information is available through the Tides Foundation Community Clinics Initiative Extranet at www.communityclinics.org.

C. Service Level Agreements

A Service Level Agreement (SLA) is a negotiated agreement designed to create a common understanding about services, priorities and responsibilities for the client/vendor relationship. Further, the SLA should be written so that services provided to a customer can be measured and justified. If certain service levels are not met, the SLA will define the penalties that will be incurred by the responsible party. In addition to language required in a contract, organizations commonly include a SLA as part of, or as an addendum to, their contract.

Appendix A

Tides Foundation Community Clinics Initiative

Information Systems Assessment

Clinic Information		
Clinic name		
Contact person and position		
Phone number	Fax number	E-mail
# Annual Medical Encounters	# Medical Providers (MDs, NPs, PAs)	Total # Staff
# Other Encounters (specify)	# Providers of these Other Services	# IS/IT Staff

General Management

1. Please complete the grid below on your current use of reports. Attach additional pages if necessary.

Name of report	How is it used?	Who uses it?	How often is it used?

2. Do you have an operational plan (formal or informal) for your information systems? Yes No
If yes, please indicate when it was developed or last updated and fax or e-mail it to the consultant.

3. Do you budget for Information Systems expenditures? Yes No
If yes, what are your IS expenditures (actual amount **and** as a percentage of overall expenses for the most recent fiscal year)? _____

4. Besides your current data, what other pieces of data do you need to help you manage your clinic?

5. What baseline or benchmark based performance measures do you use to track and trend your financial, medical, and operational health?

6. How do your providers access patient care information?

7. If financial risk is an issue for your clinic, what tools and data does your information systems provide you to manage that risk?

8. Do your systems integrate clinical and financial aspects of your operations? Yes No

9. Do your information systems support patient education? Yes No

10. Do your information systems allow providers to communicate with other providers for case management? Yes No

11. How do your clinical systems help track patients for preventive and follow-up care?

12. Do you share information with hospitals, affiliated physicians, payors, and other clinics? Yes No
If yes, how is data shared with these other entities?

Current Technology Infrastructure

13. Please complete the below table with the numbers of desktop computers/workstations in each category.

Processor	386	486	Pentium	Pentium II or III	Macintosh	Other
Operating System						
DOS						
Windows 3.x						
Windows 95/98						
Windows NT/2000						
OS/2						
Mac System x						
Unix OS						

14. Please provide a list of all of your host systems and servers.

- Processor type/speed (486, Pentium 266, etc.) _____
- Amount of disk storage (4GB, 8GB, etc.) _____
- Amount of memory/RAM (64MB, 128MB) _____
- Network operating system (NT Server, Novell, Unix, etc.) _____
- Number of PCs/workstations connected _____
- Protocols used (IPX, TCP/IP, NetBEUI) _____

15. If your organization has more than one site/facility, please indicate how many sites: _____.
Please explain how each of the sites are linked via communication lines (i.e. Dial-up/modem, T1, fractional T1, etc.)

16. Please provide the following information, if applicable:

- Internet connection (type, services, speed and connection): _____
- E-mail (type and services): _____
- Web browsing (type and services): _____
- Intranet/extranet (type and services): _____

Software and Applications

17. Please list the product name, release/version, & vendor/manufacturer of your **accounting software**.

18. Please list the product name, release/version, & vendor/manufacturer of your **practice management software**.

19. Please list the product name, release/version, & vendor/manufacturer of your **clinical/medical management software**.

20. Please list the product name, release/version, & vendor/manufacturer of your **desktop/office software** (spreadsheets, word-processing, email, databases, etc).

21. Please fill out the chart below:

Function	Manual	Automated, which software?	Integrated with another system (please identify which system)	Don't know
Registration				
Eligibility				
Appointment Scheduling				
Patient tracking and recall				
Case Management				
Utilization Review				
Medical Records				
Referrals				
Ancillary Services (Rx, Lab, X-Ray)				
Billing/Claims				
Payroll				
Accounts Payable				
Accounts Receivable				
Managed Care Features				
Other:				

Hardware and Software Technical Support

22. Please list internal/clinic staff members that support any clinic hardware, software, or communications links. Also please indicate their job title and the level of support they provide.

23. Please list external vendors, contractors, or consultants that support any clinic hardware, software, communications links, or operational services (e.g. transcription, patient visit coding). Please indicate if there is a support contract with documented service levels or if it is a per call arrangement.

24. Please describe the process(es) of how staff are trained on clinic systems and applications (internal training, training from software vendor, online help) and the frequency training occurs.

Appendix B

Format of IT Strategic Plan

Purpose of Technology:

Define the purpose of technology in your organization. Is it to provide the ability to bill payers for services, to provide valuable information to providers in caring for patients, etc.? What is the mission of technology in your company?

Purpose: _____

Short Term Goals - These are goals, which should be met in a 1 to 2 year period.

Goal 1: _____

Objective:

Plan:

Goal 2: _____

Objective:

Plan:

Long Term Goals - These are goals, which should be met in a 3 to 5 year period.

Goal 1: _____

Objective:

Plan:

Goal 2: _____

Objective:

Plan:

Appendix C

TECHNOLOGY ASSESSMENT – DUE DILIGENCE STATEMENT

TECHNOLOGY ASSESSMENT – DUE DILIGENCE STATEMENT

In order to be eligible to receive CCI funding to purchase information technology, we require you to complete and sign this checklist and submit it with your grant proposal. This checklist has been designed as a guide to ensure that you have evaluated all of the relevant factors necessary for selecting the appropriate information technology to meet your strategic goals. While extensive, this checklist may not be comprehensive of all steps you should pursue prior to making a technology selection decision.

Name		Phone	
Organization		E-mail	

1. **Organizational and Technical Assessment** - Our organization has completed a review of the following organizational and technical capabilities and risk areas. The results support our Organizational and Technology Strategies and the related information technology purchase we are requesting funding for.

Organizational Environment Assessment

Assessment of all non-technical needs and drivers of the organization such as user requirements, customer support requirements, reporting requirements, decision-making drivers, data policies and procedures, etc...

Technical Environment Assessment

Assessment of the technical environment and related requirements such as information systems capabilities, data processing needs, standards compliance issues, information security needs, connectivity considerations, networking considerations, integration considerations, technical staffing, etc...

Opportunities for Change

Assessment of what opportunities exist to redesign a process and increase related efficiency with information technology, to implement an emerging technology to take the organization farther than previously conceptualized, etc...

2. **Strategic Plan** - Our organization has developed a Strategic Plan for Information Technology that compliments and advances the overall strategic goals of our organization including, but not limited to the following:

How information technology supports our mission and vision statements

Strategic goals related to all assessment steps noted in step #1.

Critical issues to be taken into consideration, highlighting short-term and long-term implications

Plan for achieving expected return-on-investment through information technology implementation

3. **IT Selection** - Our organization has assessed the information technology product(s) for which we are requesting funding, including but not limited to the following:

Vendor Analysis

Assessment of how well the vendor will meet long-term relationship criteria in terms of their mission, customer focus, financial statements, membership in industry organizations, etc...

Product Technology Analysis

Assessment of how well the underlying architecture, delivery method, etc... as well as a review of the product's compliance with industry standards and security practices, Internet capabilities, interoperability meet with short-term and long-term strategic goals.

Product Functionality Analysis

Assessment of how well the features and functionality meet your organizations needs including detailed reporting, ad hoc reporting needs, flexibility to customize product, etc...

Implementation, Training and Support Services

Assessment of the services provided as part of the technology solution to ensure that they meet both the financial and operational needs of the organization.

Reference Checks

One of the best methods of ensuring the product's efficacy and proven capability is to ask detailed questions of others that have implemented the product. Reference checks should be performed on at least three independent purchasing organizations (and discussed with both purchasers and users to obtain all perspectives).

With this statement, I acknowledge that the due diligence noted above was performed and supports the grant request for information technology as noted in the attached proposal.

Signature _____

Date _____