Sonoma County Contracting for Safety Net Services

Information and Tips for Community-Based Organizations



Several Sonoma County departments, including the Human Services Department (HSD), Department of Health Services (DHS), Probation Department, and others, contract with community-based organizations to deliver safety net services to Sonoma County residents. **Safety net services** refer to a range of programs and supports designed to assist individuals, particularly those with limited resources, in accessing essential services.

County safety net departments identify the most responsive, effective, and responsible service providers through fair, open, transparent, and competitive procurement processes. This guide is designed to help community-based organizations prepare for and successfully apply to contract with the County to deliver these valuable services.

CONTINUE READING FOR MORE:

Preparing to apply for funding - Pg 2

Applying for funding - Pg 5

After funding award - Pg 7

Q&A and resources - Pg 10

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Preparing to apply for funding

Position your organization for success

Ensure the structure and systems are in place to effectively deliver services and successfully comply with requirements *before* submitting a proposal. Confirm your organization:

Maintains good business standing with the Secretary of State and is not federally suspended or debarred on SAM.gov.

Implements robust systems and practices (called internal controls) to ensure operational effectiveness, reliability of reporting, and compliance with laws and funder requirements. Examples include segregation of duties, written policies and procedures, and board oversight.

Operates strong financial and accounting systems to track and monitor funding. Maintains separate financial records for each funding source to support transparency and accurate reporting across programs. Implements fiscal internal controls, including regular reconciliation of accounts, approval protocols for expenditures, and ongoing monitoring to prevent errors or misuse of funds.

Collects and reports data, including eligibility documentation, if applicable, to support program implementation and outcomes. All activities must be documented – **if it is not recorded, it did not happen!**

Participates in community-wide coalitions and initiatives. Smaller organizations with niche target populations or services can best compete for future funding opportunities through collaboration and partnerships with larger, more versatile organizations. Building formal partnerships positions organizations more strongly when funding becomes available. Subcontracting with organizations that provide a broad array of services for a particular area or population is another strategy.

Seeks a variety of funding opportunities, strengthening competitiveness through networking, searching online, and engaging with community stakeholders to understand local needs and how philanthropic organizations and Federal, State, and County governments are addressing them.

Belongs to professional membership associations and organizations that provide networking, advice, resources, advocacy, and trainings. Some examples include CalNonprofits, National Council of Nonprofits, and National Grants Management Association.

Register in the Sonoma County Supplier Portal

The County is committed to a transparent and competitive procurement process to acquire safety net services that welcome all qualified contractors. All potential contractors are encouraged to register in the Sonoma County Supplier Portal, the County's system for competitive procurements: www.sonomacounty.gov/SupplierPortal

Registration is required to view funding opportunities (called solicitations), receive alerts and updates, and submit bids/proposals. The County uses the Supplier Portal to maintain the integrity of the procurement process and ensure everyone gets the same information at the same time.

Preparing to apply for funding

Sonoma County Supplier Portal registration hints

Register as a **Bidder** if your organization has not done business with the County of Sonoma.

Register as a **Supplier** if it is currently or has previously received payment for goods/services and has been assigned a Supplier ID.

Select relevant services and/or subcategories to receive email notifications for all matching solicitations.



Use a generic email address to ensure continued receipt of notifications even if individual contacts change.

Review the Frequently Asked Questions on the Supplier Portal under FAQs. It includes instructions on how to register.

Email supplier-desk@sonomacounty.gov for help.

Preparation Tips

Align funding opportunities with organizational capacity.
Do not pursue funding solely because it is available. Ensure each funding opportunity aligns with the organization's mission, vision, goals, services, and staffing capacity.

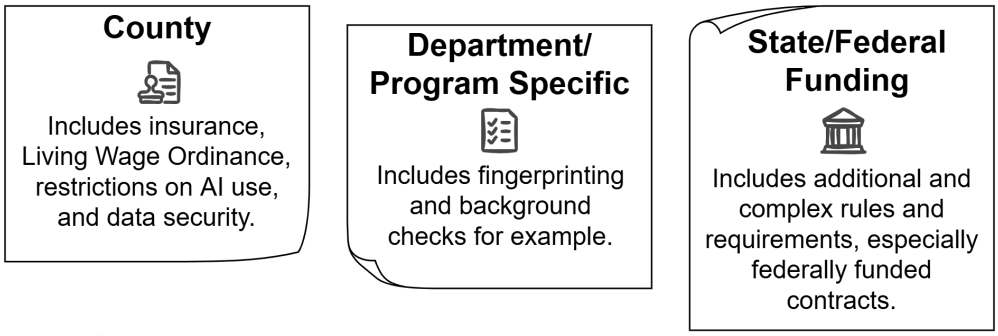
County safety net departments that fund needed community-based services operate in alignment with the Board of Supervisors' Strategic Plan. Confirm that organizational services fit within this framework.

Establish internal alignment before proposal development.
Management, finance, and program staff must agree on objectives, roles, timelines, deliverables, etc. *prior* to drafting the proposal.

Confirm ability to meet *all* contracting requirements.
See next page for a summary of general requirements and refer to the sample contract included in solicitation materials for the specific obligations tied to each opportunity.

Preparing to apply for funding

Can your organization meet all requirements?



Contracting requirements

County requirements

General requirements for contracting with the County include, but aren't limited to: insurance coverage, compliance with the Living Wage Ordinance, restrictions on the use of Artificial Intelligence, and data security obligations for client and county data (e.g., NIST, HIPAA).

Organizations must confirm compliance with privacy and security obligations related to Personal Information (PI), Personally Identifiable Information (PII), and Protected Health Information (PHI) that your organization may create, receive, maintain, use, or disclose for or on behalf of the County. This also includes adherence to protections governing Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) as defined under California Penal Code §13300, and juvenile case file information as outlined in Welfare and Institutions Code §827, when applicable.

As part of the procurement process, your organization may be required to complete a questionnaire to confirm it meets the minimum privacy and security qualifications required to administer an awarded contract. Evaluation of overall compliance with the privacy and security requirements may also be required once awarded a contract.

Department/program requirements

Each safety net department may require compliance with additional policies and procedures. For example, the Human Services Department has established specific Fiscal Policies relating to indirect cost rates and program income. Additionally, departments may require fingerprinting and background checks for individuals working with vulnerable populations. For instance, staff working with children need to pass background checks conducted by state and federal agencies, including child abuse history screening. Staff working with elderly or dependent adults must also pass background checks.

State/Federal funding requirements

The County often serves as a pass-through entity for federal awards. Contracts supported by state/federal funding include additional requirements. Federally funded contracts, in particular, involve complicated and extensive rules. Refer to the General Accounting Division's webpage for General Information for Federally Funded Contracts, including a handbook for managing federal awards and information on 2 CFR Part 200 (commonly known as the Uniform Guidance), which outlines the rules and regulations associated with federal funding.

Applying for funding

Procurement is cyclical; County safety net departments are typically required to procure services every 3-4 years, regardless of how long or how well a current contractor has been providing services. County safety net departments commonly use several procurement types, each with distinct purposes and requirements.

Request for Proposals (RFP)

Announces a County project or program and invites organizations to submit their proposals on how the work will be completed. Typically requires a structured response to questions and involves a competitive selection process.

Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA)

While not technically a procurement, a NOFA announces funding available for specific program areas, defines who can apply, and outlines how funding can be used. Organizations are asked to present a high level project or program proposal that fits within the NOFA program area(s). Typically requires a structured response to questions and involves a competitive selection process.

Request for Qualifications (RFQ)

Invites organizations to detail background and experience in providing a specific service to develop a qualified pool of providers that the County may contract with as needs arise.

Quotes & Applications

County Departments may contact various providers and ask for quotes or they may have application processes in place (like those found on HSD's Vendor Interest page and the Doing Business with DHS page) to identify and select service providers.

Proposal Writing Tips

Use a collaborative approach, supported by letters of commitment from community partners, if necessary, to show how certain geographic areas or particular needs will be met.

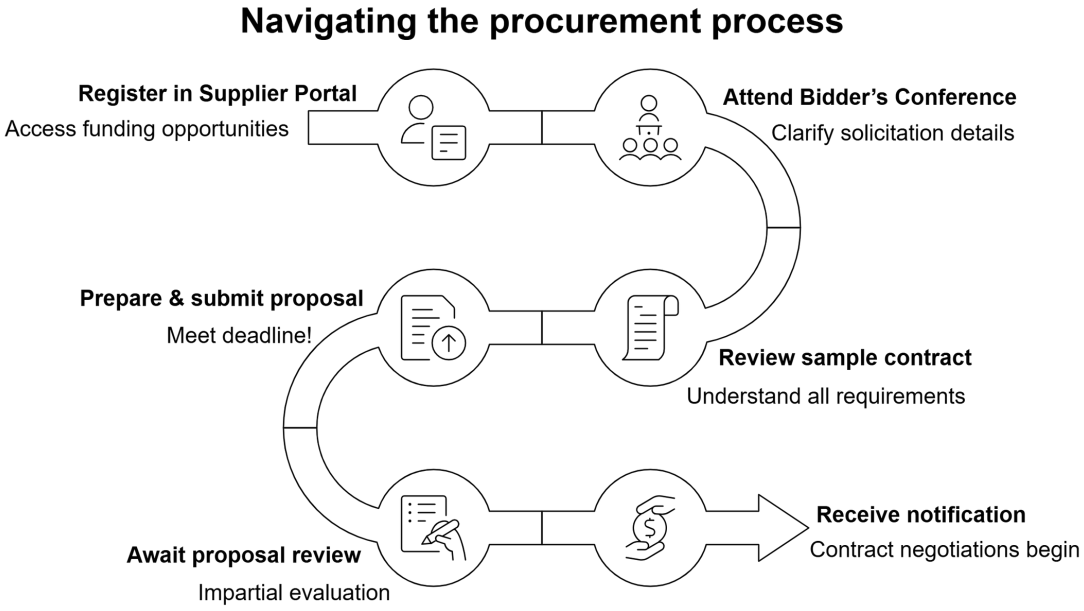
Submit proposals on time!
Build in extra time to account for potential technical issues. Upload submission packets to the Supplier Portal well before the deadline and double check all required documents have been included.

Learn from previous proposals.
If a proposal is not awarded, request feedback from County on the scoring and ask for a copy of the winning proposal. Prepare for the next funding cycle by asking other more experienced organizations for feedback and review of your proposal before submission.

Funding opportunity types

Request for Proposals (RFP)	Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA)	Request for Qualifications (RFQ)	Quotes & Applications
Announces a project and invites structured proposals with competitive selection	Announces available funding for specific areas with competitive selection	Requests service experience to create a pool of qualified providers	Requests quotes or applications to provide services

Applying for funding



How to apply for RFP/NOFA/RFQ procurements

1. **Register in the Supplier Portal** (see pg. 2). Once notified of a funding opportunity that matches your organizational services, download and carefully review all solicitation documents, including the schedule.

2. **Attend the Bidder's Conference**, when offered. County staff walk through the solicitation and provide the opportunity to ask questions. Written questions may also be submitted; all Q&As are posted as an addendum on the Supplier Portal, which must be signed and submitted with the proposal.

3. **Review the sample contract carefully** and sign to attest willingness to enter into an agreement with the County safety net department under the terms outlined. Any provisions not accepted (e.g., insurance requirements), must be listed on the form along with proposed alternative language. If funded, the County Department, in consultation with County Counsel and County Risk Management, as applicable, may be willing to negotiate.

4. **Prepare and submit the proposal**, complete all required forms, and upload all required documents in the Supplier Portal by the due date. Late proposals are not accepted.

5. **Await proposal review** by County staff to confirm submissions meet the minimum qualifications (MQs) outlined in the solicitation. For RFPs/NOFAs, an impartial review committee evaluates all proposals that meet MQs. Committee members independently score each proposal solely based on the evaluation criteria outlined in the solicitation documents. The committee then convenes to finalize scores and make funding recommendations. Occasionally, proposers are asked to participate in an interview as part of the final review process. For RFQs, County staff determine which proposer(s) has the best qualifications to meet the need(s) and may invite any organization who passed MQs to enter into an agreement at any time during the procurement period.

6. **Receive notification** from the County. County will invite selected proposers to enter into contract negotiations.

After funding award

Contracting process

Once an organization is selected to receive funding, contract negotiations begin. Program design and implementation plans, accounting systems and processes, data collection systems, and internal controls must be in place to start services and comply with regulations. Certificates of the types and levels of insurance detailed in the contract must also be provided.

The response to the RFP/NOFA about the project's design, service delivery, and outcome measures/reporting becomes the backbone of the contract's **Scope of Work**. The Scope of Work clearly outlines roles and responsibilities of both the organization (i.e., the Contractor) and the County. The County contract lead (e.g., contract manager, lead programming staff) engages the Contractor in negotiations to approve the draft Scope of Work and will approve or negotiate the submitted **Budget** for the contract term. Deliverables, timelines, and other requirements must be clearly understood before services begin.

The draft contract is available to review prior to signing, and terms may be negotiated; however, certain provisions cannot be changed. Early notification of requested changes to the contract lead helps prevent delays in service delivery. Before execution of the contract, the County safety net department requests any additional required documents such as insurance certificates, licenses, and fiscal forms.



Contracting Tips

Confirm the budget complies with all County and funding source requirements.

Review the entire draft contract and ask questions if unclear about any provisions/ requirements.

Inform insurance broker about the types and limits of insurance required. In particular, the County requires an Additional Insured Endorsement; Cyber Liability Insurance if Personal Identifiable Information (PII) is accessed; and Sexual Abuse or Molestation (SAM) Liability Insurance if scope of work involves contact with minors, dependent adults, or other vulnerable populations. **Many contracts are delayed because of this piece.**

Respond quickly to any requests from County staff to prevent delays in contract execution.

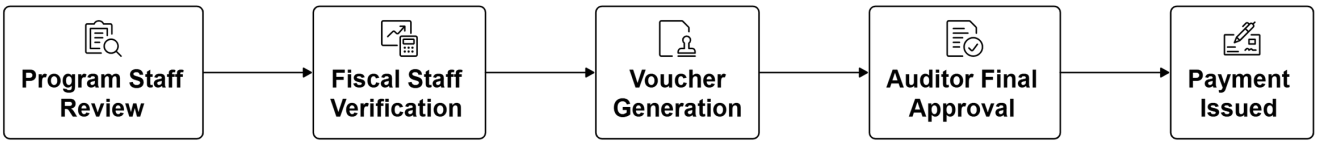
A contract <u>should</u> be executed before services begin and <u>must</u> be executed before any payments can be made.

After funding award

Invoicing and payment process

To receive payment, an accurate invoice must be submitted using a template approved by the contract lead. Required supporting documentation may include receipts, payroll reports, timecards, and general ledger reports. The review process includes steps to ensure submitted costs are eligible for payment: 1) Program staff confirm expenditures are in line with the scope, budget, and regulations; 2) Fiscal staff verify that expenditures have not exceeded budget amounts, the correct payee data forms are on file, and all required supporting documentation is complete; 3) a voucher is generated and submitted to the County Auditor upon department approval; and 4) final approval is granted, and payment is issued either by check or through electronic transfer (called an Automated Clearing House payment, or ACH).

Payment processing at a glance



The payment timeline is impacted by internal processing procedures within the safety net department, check printing (done twice per week), and mail delivery delays outside the County's control. Additional processing steps are required at the start of the fiscal year, or when amendments are issued, which may extend the payment timeline.

By default, the County issues payment by check. ACH payments are much faster; however, initial ACH set up may take up to two months. Once established, ACH payments are processed every weekday (with exceptions for holidays). The County encourages selecting ACH as the default payment method for faster, more secure payments. Timely and complete responses to any questions from County staff help expedite the invoice review process.

Reporting on your program's implementation

Contractors must collect and report data in accordance with contract requirements. A formal evaluation may be required to help demonstrate program outcomes and impact on clients served. Results-Based Accountability (RBA) is one framework the County uses that asks three questions to get at the most important program outputs and outcomes: How much did we do? How well did we do it? Is anyone better off? County staff work in partnership with your organization to design and implement RBA if applicable.

The County contract lead collaborates with contractors to support program success. Periodic reviews of activities and outcomes ensure alignment with goals and requirements. This includes review of monthly invoices and any required data or evaluation reports, and may involve check-ins to discuss progress. The purpose is to identify what's working well, address challenges, and provide technical assistance so any issues can be resolved promptly. Contract amendments may sometimes be necessary to adjust the scope or budget to reflect actual program implementation.

After funding award

Formal monitoring

Contracts that include federal funds require formal monitoring. County or sub-contracted staff conduct annual or bi-annual programmatic and fiscal monitoring to ensure compliance and offer technical assistance. Staff also monitor the activities of subrecipients (organizations awarded federal funds from the County to carry out all or part of a federal award), as necessary, to ensure compliance with Federal statutes, regulations, and the terms and conditions of the subaward.

Program monitoring verifies that programs are implemented as planned, in accordance with all requirements, and achieve stated goals and objectives. **Fiscal monitoring** ensures that funds are used for allowable activities and are properly documented, cost allocations are appropriate, and financial records are properly maintained. In general, the monitoring process includes the following:

Monitoring Questionnaires

Contractors may be asked to complete questionnaires about program operations, policies and procedures, accounting processes, experience in managing federal funds, previous audits, etc. This may include an initial risk assessment for subrecipients designed to assess the risk of noncompliance. Responses inform the monitoring process and identify areas where additional support may be needed. Questionnaires may be required at the time of contracting and at the beginning of each monitoring cycle.

On-site and/or Desk Monitoring Activities

Contractors must submit requested programmatic and/or fiscal documentation for review. Examples include policies and procedures, invoices, timesheets, single audit reports, eligibility documentation for a sample of clients, and other records. County or sub-contracted staff may visit your site and gather additional information about your program.

Monitoring Reports

County or sub-contracted staff issue written reports containing the monitoring results, including any corrective actions required. Contractors must provide a written response and/or corrective action plan. Corrective action must be taken immediately and will be reviewed.



Monitoring Tips

Record ALL program activities to clearly document activities and impact.

Monitor monthly spending closely and maintain supporting back-up documentation such as invoices, timesheets, and receipts, to support expenses.

Understand and comply fully with all contract requirements and applicable federal/state/local regulations.

Submit any program or funder-required data reports accurately and on time.

Store all documentation (program records, reports, invoices and supporting documentation, and communications) in a central location for easy access.

Communicate regularly with the County contract lead and seek clarification or support when needed.

Q&A and resources

Q&A

Q. Why does it take a significant amount of time to execute a contract?

The contracting process can take many months to complete and involves numerous steps by both County staff and contractors. Contract negotiations can take several weeks and all required documentation such as proof of insurance, fiscal forms, and/or licenses must be received before the agreement can be finalized. In addition, greater contract amounts require additional review and approval (e.g., by the Purchasing Department or Board of Supervisors) and typically increases the timeline.

Q. What are common reasons payments are delayed?

1. Missing or insufficient backup documentation
2. Incomplete or late invoice submission
3. Work described is outside the scope or work has not been performed as specified in contract
4. Incomplete SmartCare patient records (specific to some DHS contracts)
5. Contract is not yet executed

Q. What are the most common errors in administering grant-funded contracts?

1. Insufficient Supporting Documentation – missing or incomplete details about program activities, participant eligibility, or financial transactions
2. Inadequate Accounting Systems – difficulty tracking multiple funding sources and staff time allocation methods
3. Improper Rebudgeting – transferring money among line items without County approval
4. Inaccurate Progress Reporting – performance updates lack accuracy and completeness
5. Missing or Unfollowed Policies – written policies & procedures are absent or not adhered to
6. Lack of Internal Controls – insufficient “checks and balances” to prevent errors

Resources

Purchasing: Working with the County

Sonoma County Supplier Portal: User Registration

Doing Business with DHS

HSD's Vendor Interest

HSD Contracts and Procurement Unit

HSD Finance Department

General Accounting Division’s General Information for Federally Funded Contracts

Created by the Human Services Contracts and Procurement Unit, in partnership with the Department of Health Services and the Probation Department