

Guide to Creating a Comprehensive Request for Proposal (RFP)

What Should You Look for in an ECM?

Enterprise Content Management (ECM) helps hospitals take control of a wide variety of content such as scanned documents, eForms, digital pictures, electronic data, radiology images and more. A comprehensive ECM solution empowers hospitals to refine and streamline processes, improve collaboration and boost productivity while managing the entire life cycle of content.

An ECM solution should enable hospitals, healthcare systems and IDNs to build flexible processes that cross departments and systems to fit and support their business practices, instead of having to change business processes to comply with system limitations. The successful ECM solution needs to streamline and automate business practices, improve efficiency, enable meaningful and timely collaboration across teams, departments and systems, and reduce costs.

A robust ECM solution can deliver alerts and notifications, raise visibility of and resolve bottlenecks, and help you identify processes that are non-functioning or in need of refinement. Your organization can also identify individual performance issues for both recognition and coaching, and also empower executives to stay on the pulse of the organization by receiving mobile alerts for critical processes, real-time analytics and KPIs.

How to Create an ECM Request for Proposal (RFP)

Most RFPs typically consist of two main parts. The first part clearly expresses the compelling factors that are leading your healthcare organization to search for an ECM solution and your organization's expectations for the benefits that you expect to gain by installing an ECM solution. The second part of your RFP should provide detailed technical requirements in a format that allows the candidate vendor to include responses and supporting documentation.

Compelling Factor or Event

Use this portion of your RFP to talk about what led your organization to begin the search for the ideal ECM solution. Identify your organization's challenges and outline the processes that are causing issues and concerns that need to be addressed. Clearly express your pain points and the improvements that you expect to realize by implementing this software solution.

Setting clear and detailed expectations will help responding vendors offer feedback that is more meaningful and specific to your organization. This section should also include details regarding the facilities that are going to use the solution and your mission statement. The more the vendor understands your organization and what you are trying to achieve, the better.

Identify Needs/Technical Requirements

The Technical Requirements section should be the largest portion of your RFP. After defining the reasons why you are searching for an ECM solution, you need to identify the critical needs and technical requirements necessary for a successful implementation. These may include vendor stability and longevity in the market, domain expertise, functional capabilities, technical and architectural considerations, training details and options, and technical support methodologies.

Value Added Services

A new section has been added to many RFP's recently to discover capabilities and benefits that the candidate system provides that may not have been uncovered by the other sections of your RFP.

Here are some key factors that the winning ECM solution should include:

Vendor Stability and Domain Expertise – It is important to ensure that your ECM vendor will be a stable, available and an innovative partner to your organization for the long term. In this section, the questions are designed to determine how long the vendor and product have been working in the healthcare industry, how much the healthcare product that you are considering are a focus for the organization, and how well prepared it is to provide the support that you will need throughout the implementation process and beyond.

Privacy and Security – The winning solution should offer flexible and configurable security tools to control user access based upon a variety of criteria including Care Site, Visit Type, and Document Type to name a few. All documents that the user has permission to see should be presented in an easy to navigate and intuitive format regardless of the document's original source (scanned, interfaced, imported etc.).

The vendor of choice should offer multi-level security for permissions to edit and modify documents. All changes need to be automatically audited by the system and multiple versions of the document should be stored and accessible to those who have permission to see prior versions. The vendor should exhibit a thorough understanding of HIPAA, and the software should have comprehensive tools for ensuring compliance including auditing, reporting, and user permissions that protect patient information.

Scanning and Indexing – The ECM software will be used to digitize remaining paper documents including legacy charts, nursing home transfers, ambulance run sheets and any other documents that are still in paper form. You'll want to ensure that the solution you choose leverages efficiency tools including bar code recognition for automating document and patient indexing and a variety of tools to make the Quality Review process flexible, quick and efficient.

Workflow – A comprehensive ECM system needs to provide flexible workflows that can be easily designed by a business analyst level resource and require no programming experience. The workflows should be capable of reaching across systems and departments, performing automated tasks in the background, and providing worklists and alerts to the proper user when human intervention is required.

Worklists should be fully configurable and access should be permission based. The workflow design tools should have full reporting capabilities and should be easy to modify, providing an iterative approach to workflow design.

Electronic Forms – This capability is unique among top vendors in the ECM space. Electronic forms should resemble their hand-written counterparts so they are easy to navigate and use, but offer many additional features including collection and use of real-time actionable data that can drive workflows and reports, and can be sent via outbound interface to other databases, the ability to perform calculations, and tools that promote data integrity including pick lists, drop-down lists and radio buttons. The eForms tool should be capable of producing anonymous eForms that can be completed by users outside the system such as patients via portals and kiosks.

Technology and Integrations – The winning ECM system should include a comprehensive and proven suite of integration methods including Service Oriented Architecture (SOA) technology to enable real time information sharing. Your chosen ECM system should integrate seamlessly with your ADT system, your Clinical Information System, a wide variety of other clinical systems and other business applications including Lawson and PeopleSoft.

Rather than a rip and replace strategy, your ECM solution should form a solid, flexible bridge between your existing systems to eliminate information silos, drastically reduce duplication of data and enhance the functionality and longevity of your current IT investments.

Scalability – The solution should be both horizontally and vertically scalable. The vendor should be able to substantiate their ability to support your organization whatever the size and complexity – from very small hospitals up to very large IDNs. The goal should be to work with the winning vendor to determine the planned growth for features, applications, hardware, and storage, and configure a system that will allow for growth by simply adding processors, memory and software modules instead of requiring replacement of equipment and software.

Reporting – The solution should have robust reporting features including the ability to schedule reports, customize reports, and design reports from scratch. The system should have the ability to provide alerts and dashboards. The reporting tool should be able to reach across systems and departments. The vendor should offer a variety of reports at no charge and should offer consulting services to develop or assist your site in developing custom reports if needed.

Release of Information – The vendor should be able to customize options for file version control that have the ability to keep all versions of a document, and to make the prior versions visible to only certain audiences to avoid confusion for clinicians and release of information purposes. All actions and activities performed by users and by the system itself are audited, which will facilitate compliance with healthcare privacy regulations, risk avoidance, privacy breach detection and other hospital compliance policies.

The Release of Information module should be able to fulfill requests in paper and electronic forms, be able to calculate any applicable fees, product in invoice and include the reports you need to comply with HIPAA and other privacy regulations.

Registration – The vendor should be able to support a variety of methods to integrate with other systems. For example, make sure the vendor supports command line launch, Active X, and CCOW to collect the MRN, Account Number, and other information including Visit Type and Payor Class. This can help greatly reduce the amount of time to register the patient and also to train the Registrar on the system. Also be sure that the vendor can integrate with Star and the Client Server platforms to collect ADT data.

For ADT in particular, the most common scenario is for the vendor to receive ADT data from the source system to create encounters (accounts) to which documents are attached and stored in the repository. Much of the ADT data is stored discretely and can be used for other purposes. For example, the generation of barcodes for wristbands and labels is done out of the registration system.

The Registration system should product a pick list of the correct documents to collect, depending on the visit type and/or insurance coverage.