

AMENDMENT OF SOLICITATION/MODIFICATION OF CONTRACT

1. CONTRACT ID CODE _____ PAGE OF PAGES _____

2. AMENDMENT/MODIFICATION NO.	3. EFFECTIVE DATE	4. REQUISITION/PURCHASE REQ. NO.	5. PROJECT NO. <i>(If applicable)</i>
6. ISSUED BY CODE _____	7. ADMINISTERED BY <i>(If other than Item 6)</i> CODE _____		

8. NAME AND ADDRESS OF CONTRACTOR <i>(No., street, county, State, and ZIP Code)</i> CODE _____ FACILITY CODE _____	(x)	9A. AMENDMENT OF SOLICITATION NO.
		9B. DATED <i>(SEE ITEM II)</i>
		10A. MODIFICATION OF CONTRACT/ORDER NO.
		10B. DATED <i>(See Item 13)</i>

11. THIS ITEM ONLY APPLIES TO AMENDMENTS OF SOLICITATIONS

The above numbered solicitation is amended as set forth in Item 14. The hour and date specified for receipt of Offers is extended, is not extended.

Offers must acknowledge receipt of this amendment prior to the hour and date specified in the solicitation or as amended, by one of the following methods:

- (a) By completing Items 8 and 15, and returning _____ copies of the amendment;
- (b) By acknowledging receipt of this amendment on each copy of the offer submitted; or
- (c) By separate letter or telegram which includes a reference to the solicitation and amendment numbers. FAILURE OF YOUR ACKNOWLEDGMENT TO BE RECEIVED AT THE PLACE DESIGNATED FOR THE RECEIPT OF OFFERS PRIOR TO THE HOUR AND DATE SPECIFIED MAY RESULT IN REJECTION OF YOUR OFFER. If by virtue of this amendment you desire to change an offer already submitted, such change may be made by telegram or letter, provided each telegram or letter makes reference to the solicitation and this amendment, and is received prior to the opening hour and date specified.

12. ACCOUNTING AND APPROPRIATION DATA *(If required)*

13. THIS ITEM APPLIES ONLY TO MODIFICATIONS OF CONTRACTS/ORDERS. IT MODIFIES THE CONTRACT/ORDER NO. AS DESCRIBED IN ITEM 14.

(x)	A. THIS CHANGE ORDER IS ISSUED PURSUANT TO: <i>(Specify authority)</i> THE CHANGES SET FORTH IN ITEM 14 ARE MADE IN THE CONTRACT ORDER NO. IN ITEM 10A.
	B. THE ABOVE NUMBERED CONTRACT/ORDER IS MODIFIED TO REFLECT THE ADMINISTRATIVE CHANGES <i>(such as changes in paying office, appropriation date, etc.)</i> SET FORTH IN ITEM 14, PURSUANT TO THE AUTHORITY OF FAR 43.103(b).
	C. THIS SUPPLEMENTAL AGREEMENT IS ENTERED INTO PURSUANT TO AUTHORITY OF:
	D. OTHER <i>(Specify type of modification and authority)</i>

E. IMPORTANT: Contractor is not, is required to sign this document and return _____ copies to the issuing office.

14. DESCRIPTION OF AMENDMENT/MODIFICATION *(Organized by UCF section headings, including solicitation/contract subject matter where feasible.)*

Except as provided herein, all terms and conditions of the document referenced in item 9A or 10A, as heretofore changed, remains unchanged and in full force and effect.

15A. NAME AND TITLE OF SIGNER <i>(Type or print)</i>	16A. NAME AND TITLE OF CONTRACTING OFFICER <i>(Type or print)</i>		
15B. CONTRACTOR/OFFEROR <i>(Signature of person authorized to sign)</i>	15C. DATE SIGNED	16B. UNITED STATES OF AMERICA <i>(Signature of Contracting Officer)</i>	16C. DATE SIGNED

1. There is a discrepancy between the recommended small business goals on page 1 and page 93 of the RFP. Is it the Government's intention that 23% of the total planned subcontracting dollars (not of the total contract value) be subcontracted to small businesses? If yes, then are each of the four categories of small businesses (i.e., small disadvantaged businesses, women-owned small businesses, Hubzone small businesses, and veteran-owned small businesses) also a percentage of the total planned subcontracting dollars (not of the total contract value)?

Response: The Government's intention is that 23% represents a percentage of the total planned subcontracting dollars (not of the total contract value) be subcontracted to small businesses. Each of the four categories of small businesses should also be a percentage of the total planned subcontracting dollars (not of the total contract value).

2. Page 78 of the RFP states that the Small Disadvantaged Business (SDB) Participation Plan should be *separate* from the Business Proposal, while page 89 (A) states that this plan should be a *section of* the business proposal. Should the SDB plan be part of, or separate from, the Business Proposal?

Response: The Small Disadvantaged Business (SDB) Participation Plan should be submitted in a document separate from the Business Proposal, in accordance with Section L.7, paragraph c.

3. Three deliverable items in Section F.2 of the RFP refer to the security plan: Item 4 (Security Plan, due 30 days from EDOC), Item 7 (Draft security plan, due 30 days from EDOC), and Item 8 (Final security plan, due 60 days from EDOC). What is the difference between items 4 and 7? Should item 4 refer to another deliverable, such as the quality assurance plan?

Response: Delete item 4 (Security plan, due 30 days from EDOC) from the list of deliverable items.

4. Please clarify whether the past performance information requested on pages 87 and 88 of the RFP (other than the past performance questionnaire) should be provided in the Technical Proposal or in a separate document.

Response: In accordance with Section L.7, Past Performance Information should be submitted in a separate document.

5. Pages 11 and 12 discuss AHRQ's plans to web-enable all reports and publications through use of an Oracle database. Will the contractor be responsible for developing, implementing, and maintaining this functionality, to include the Oracle database and web infrastructure?

Response: Yes.

6. Section C states that the contractor will be responsible for maintaining and performing new development for various websites. What technologies are currently in use (ASP/ASP.NET, PHP, CGI, Java, etc.)?

Response: Technologies currently in use to maintain the MEPS website include IIS, ASP, and Java. See the response to No. 49 for a list of web application development tools currently in use under the contract.

7. The contractor will be responsible for producing several sets of compact discs on an on-going basis. Does AHRQ have any plans to begin releasing data or publications in DVD format during the contract period? If so, will the contractor also be responsible for the production of these DVDs?

Response: No. AHRQ has no such plans.

8. What organization or organizations are responsible for survey administration and collection of the MEPs data? What are those organizations' responsibilities relative to loading that data into the files described in the RFP? Does the Government envision any change in that role either for the survey data collection organizations or for the contractor?

Response: The current data collection contractor is WESTAT. The data collection contractor will provide the necessary files and documentation as mentioned in C.1.7.

9. How often do the data requirements change for the inpatient databases and what would the Government envision is the potential role for the contractor relative to oversight of those changes?

Response: AHRQ's data collection and processing contractor is responsible for the data requirements and any changes. Therefore, the contractor (for this contract) does not have any responsibility for oversight of these changes.

10. What does the Government envision the role of the contractor will be relative to managing user access? Specifically, will the contractor be responsible for:
- a. Identifying current users who should continue access
 - b. Identifying and administering which users have access to which databases
 - c. Registering and clearing new users
 - d. Identifying current users who no longer have access privileges
 - e. Defining levels of security and access that should be maintained relative to users
 - f. Monitoring and analyzing user access and data activities
 - g. Training users how to use the databases and extract data

Response: The contractor will not be responsible for items a. through e. above. The contractor will be responsible partially for items f. and g.

11. Section C.1.6. of the RFP references the MEPs website and states that the website “consists of several static as well as dynamic sections which are continuously updated by the contractor.” By this reference does the Government mean the contractor as it relates to this RFP or is there an existing contractor that currently maintains the website and will continue to do so following award of this contract?

Response: We mean “the contractor” as it relates to this RFP.

12. What is the identity of the incumbent contractor or contractors?

Response: The incumbent contractor is Social and Scientific Systems.

13. Section B.3. of the RFP limits consultant fees to \$500 per day. Is this limitation only applicable to the contractor’s use of outside (external) consultants? Or is this limitation applicable to the contractor’s internal consultants, who would be providing services under this contract?

Response: This limitation applies to all consultants under the contractor who are charged to the contract. Rates in excess of \$500 per day must be approved by the contracting officer.

14. Section C.1.7. requires the contractor to produce various compact discs. Is it anticipated that the contractor would be required to produce multiple copies of each disc? If so, please estimate the quantity of copies required for each type of disc the contractor is responsible for producing.

Response: Yes. The number of compact disks that would be required varies by the type of data file. It could be as few as one or as many as one thousand. AHRQ will pay for the cost of producing multiple compact discs under this contract.

15. Section C.1.7. requires the contractor to impute certain data elements including premium data, income data, etc. Will all required data elements necessary for imputation of these data elements be provided by the Government?

Response: Yes.

16. Section C.1.10 states that the contractor should indicate what SEI/CMM certification level it has obtained. Is SEI/CMM certification a requirement? Or, is SEI/CMM certification considered in the evaluation criteria?

Response: SEI/CMM certification is not a requirement. All specific professional, scientific or technical accomplishments by the proposed contractor’s staff will be considered.

17. Section C.3.2.2.2.(c) requires the contractor to use data to perform simulated claims processing. Please estimate the quantity of claims that would require simulated processing.

Response: A given year of MEPS is about 40,000 observations, and the number with private coverage would be smaller. The complexity of claims processing with MEPS is not so much the number of observations, but rather the work involved in editing the MEPS claims data and doing the SAS coding required to construct the claims processing program.

18. Section C.3.2.2.5. requires the contractor to provide “graphical services.” Please elaborate on the Government’s expectation of the type and complexity of these graphical services.

Response: Graphical services referenced here are to support the development of MEPS online publications. This includes providing expertise on the colors, font styles and formats that would be the most effective in a web environment. In addition, the contractor is expected to provide expertise in the development and placement of pie charts, bar charts, line graphs, etc. to display data in a web publication that is user friendly.

19. The Contractor assumes that all source databases will reside on non-contractor systems (either Government-owned, or owned by other entities. Please confirm this assumption. If this assumption is not correct, please identify the databases that the Contractor is responsible for storing.

Response: All source data files necessary for the performance of this contract will be delivered to the contractor via CDs. The contractor shall store data files upon the request of the Government.

20. Section F.2. states that a monthly progress report shall be submitted to the Contracting Officer. Please describe the contents of this report.

Response: This report is the same as Item No. 6 in the delivery schedule and also should be provided to the Project Officer. See section C.3.6.2 for details of what is to be included in the progress report.

21. Section H.2.(A) and H.2.(c) refer to Section H.1. (e). This offeror could not find the referenced section. Is it included elsewhere in the RFP?

Response: No. The references in H.2(a) and H.2(c) should have referred to H.2(e).

22. Section H.11. requires submission of security and background information on every employee “ten (10) calendar days *prior* to contract award. Should this requirement be “ten (10) calendar days *after* contract award”? Also, how should the Contractor handle submission of this information on employees not yet hired at the time of award?

Response: This requirement should be met within ten (10) calendar days from when it is anticipated an employee will be working on site.” Section H.11 does not apply to employees who are not anticipated to work on site at AHRQ. It is anticipated that most of the work under this contract will be at the contractor’s facility.

23. How many Past Performance references would you like us to include in the response?

Response: There is no limit on the number of references to be provided as long as they were completed recently (since January 1, 2001) and are related directly to the requirements of this acquisition.

24. Is there currently an incumbent contractor working on any tasks covered by this RFP? If so, who are the incumbents? ... And for which pieces?

Response: The incumbent contractor is Social and Scientific Systems.

25. What are the current staff levels for existing work done by incumbents that are to be performed under this solicitation?

Response: The staffing level for existing work done by incumbents that is to be performed under this solicitation is approximately 30 FTE per year.

26. B.3.a (10) - Direct Costs - What does the term "consultant" include? As written, this could be interpreted to read, "No cost can include a person, employee, subcontractor, specialist, with a bill rate greater than \$62.50/hour for 8 hours."

Response: The term “consultant” refers to an independent contractor who furnishes advice, information, direction, assistance, etc. This does not include employees of the offeror who receive direct benefits, such as fringe benefits, vacation, sick leave, etc., from the offeror.

27. Section C.1.5 – When the CD format for HCUP, SID and Outpatient databases changed in 1998, did the data content change as well?

Response: The data content essentially did not change.

28. Section C.1.5 – Will programs and analysis need to be conducted separately for each time period (before/after 1998) or will the data be consistent? E.g., will multiple software need to be generated/maintained for each period?

Response: No, multiple software will not need to be generated for each data period. The data are yearly, and the content is generally the same. Please review the data documentation provided at www.ahrq.gov/data/hcup and www.hcup-us.ahrq.gov/home.jsp.

29. Section C.1.5 – When data is presented, is it required to match (look like) a specific OMB approved form or is format up to the users?

Response: No, it is not required to match a specific form.

30. Section C.1.9 – Will AHRQ provide for telecommunications access to the NIH and CMS from the contractor site? What access technology is to be used (e.g., dial-up; direct T1, VPN)?

Response: The offeror shall describe the access technology currently in use, by the offeror, to access NIH and CMS or propose an efficient approach that can be implemented within a short time period after contract award.

31. Section C.1.9 – What programming languages are used on the mainframe? What DBMS?

Response: SAS is the software used on the mainframe. We do not expect using DBMS on the mainframe under this contract.

32. Section C.1.10 – What components of the SAS suite is used by AHRQ? Will AHRQ provide these to the contractor?

Response: SAS/Basic and SAS/STAT. AHRQ will provide the license for these components to the contractor.

33. Section C.1.10 – Is a specific CMM level certification required?

Response: No.

34. Section C.1.11 – Is workflow, document management and other software to be included in the technical proposal, or is this to be proposed for approval after award?

Response: Yes. They are to be included in the technical proposal.

35. Section C.1.11 – Does AHRQ have standard software or preferred software that requires any interface to those in question 33?

Response: No.

36. Section C.2 – Can AHRQ define what percentage of this contract is for technical (programming, operations, database management) vs. analytical (statistical analysis, simulations, data imputation)?

Response: The entire contract is for database management and computer programming. However, some of the tasks do utilize analytical skills.

37. Section C.3.2.1.2 and C.3.2.2.4 – Would AHRQ please define “continuous onsite” support? Does this mean 24 x 7?

Response: It means providing a dedicated full-time person for the data center during normal office hours.

38. Section C.3.2.1.3 – What technology(ies) is(are) currently used to conduct the data transfers?

Response: AHRQ will provide data transfer hardware/software for use by the contractor.

39. Section C.3.2.1.4 – How many data editing tasks are defined as “mission critical”?

Response: All data editing tasks are considered “mission critical”.

40. Section C.3.2.1.6 – Does AHRQ already have standard QA and CM software in use? If so, will this be made available to the contractor for either onsite or offsite use?

Response: All existing software developed under the contract will be made available to the contractor.

41. Section C.3.2.2.1 – Can AHRQ provide an estimate of the number of trips required to the Washington DC area data facilities?

Response: 1-2 times a month.

42. Section C.3.2.2.5 – Please clarify the use of the term “development”. Will the contractor be required to write the briefs, or just format data provided by another source for publishing and distribution?

Response: The briefs will be provided to the contractor for publishing and distribution.

43. Section C.3.2.2.6 – requires a “dedicated team”. Has AHRQ determined a Level of Effort for this support, and if so, will it share that information with bidders?

Response: No.

44. Section C.3.5 – Does AHRQ have language in the contract with the incumbent contractor that will facilitate the ease of communications and cooperation during the transition phase?

Response: Yes.

45. Section C.3.6.2 – Does AHRQ have standards for monthly reporting, e.g., MS-Project, Excel? Is an EVAM required

Response: Monthly progress and summary cost reports should be prepared in Word and Excel formats respectively. See section C.3.6.2 for details of what is to be included in these reports.

46. Section H.1.(b) – Are copies of the User Guides referenced available for review?

Response: Yes.

47. Section H.11 (a) General – states that the forms cited must be submitted ten (10) days “prior” to award. Will AHRQ provide sufficient pre-award notification for these documents to be prepared?

Response: See the answer to question No. 22 above.

48. Section L.10 – It is assumed this section is not required if the proposing company is an SDB. Please confirm.

Response: No. A SDB must also submit a Small Disadvantaged Business Participation Plan even if it is the prime contractor. Perhaps the SDB will not be performing 100% of the work. All contractors must comply with the requirements of this section.

49. General: Can AHRQ provide a list of software and versions that will be used and maintained under this contract?

**Response: The following is a list of software packages used by the current contractor under the contract. Most of them will be maintained for the new contract with updates/additions as needed:
Statistical Packages: SAS 8.2 and 9.0, SUDAAN 8.0.1, Stata 7 and 8 (also StatTransfer), SPSS 11, R 1.81, Wesvar 2**

Word processing, Spreadsheet, Presentation/Graphics, DBMS: MS Office XP (Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Access), WordPerfect, QuattroPro, Visio

Web tools: Frontpage, Jaws Screen Reader, WebXPress, Big Brother, WebTrends, Servers Alive, Netscape, Internet Explorer

FTP: WS-FTP32, Leech FTP

Applications development (including Web applications): VB Script, Visual Studio 6.0 (includes Visual Basic, C++), Java Script, Delphi, Oracle, NET 2003, Visual SourceSafe 6.0, StarTeam 5.2

Others: DBMSCOPY 7.06, Adobe Acrobat 6.0 Professional, Fortran, WinZip 8.1, Windows 2000 (desktop OS), APR-DRG

50. Will AHRQ provide licenses for software used on contractor site?

Response: AHRQ will take cost and efficiency into consideration with respect to issues of software license s. We plan to provide group licenses for SAS under this contract. Other software packages may be purchased by the contractor under this contract.

51. Section C-Description/Specification/Work Statement - Does that Government intend that an offeror should simply continue AHRQ processing as it is done now or will extra evaluation points be given for technical discussions incorporating processing environment innovations designed to reduce costs while improving data quality?

Response: The offeror's technical approach will be evaluated according to the technical evaluation criteria described in section M (pages 96-99) of the RFP.

52. C.1.9 - Processing Environment - Does the AHRQ have a standardized PC configuration? If yes, please identify the configuration.

Response: No. See page 14 of the RFP for relevant information.

53. C.1.9 - Processing Environment - Please clarify what hardware and operating systems in the AHRQ network data center server environment are to be maintained and managed by the contractor?

Response: None.

54. C.3.2.2.1 - Provide Programming and Related Support for Staff Research Projects - Does the requirement that the contractor have experience in techniques used with large national survey and with software used to execute such techniques also require that the contractor provide such survey software?

Response: No.

55. C.3.2.2.4 - Provide On-Site Technical Expertise to Support AHRQ Data Center Please clarify the following data source questions:

- 1) How often will data need to be extracted from other sites and other non-AHRQ data sources?
- 2) Please identify these data sources?
- 3) Will the contractor be responsible for maintaining extract interfaces with each of these data sources?

Response: The On-site person supporting the AHRQ Data Center will not be responsible for extracting data from other sites. However, we may load data from other sources onto our servers/PCs in the data center.

56. C.3.2.2.4 - Provide On-Site Technical Expertise to Support AHRQ Data Center Does this support requirement mean interfacing and coordinating with other responsible parties or does it mean the actual management of these computer operations by the contractor?

Response: The task of "on-site data center support" requires that an experienced technical support individual be assigned on-site at

AHRQ to maintain the data center systems in accordance with AHRQ policy and procedures, serve as the gate keeper for confidential data maintained onsite, and interface with the AHRQ designated LAN administrator for the data center. The task does not include hardware/network/software licensing support, configuration management, or computer operations management.

57. C.3.5.1 - Transfer Plan - As a part of the transfer (transition), what existing government equipment and licenses will be available for the contractor use? Will existing PCs be available for use by the contractor?

Response: Existing government equipment (e.g., servers for data sharing, data transfer and/or backup) will be made available for use by the contractor. However, we do not expect any existing PCs be available for use by the contractor. See the response to No. 50 regarding software licenses.

58. C.3.6.1 - Project Management Plan - Please confirm and clarify what is meant by "on-site data center support". Does this include hardware, network, and software licensing support? Configuration management? Any computer operations management?

Response: See the response to No. 56.

59. L.8.a - Technical Proposal Instructions - Do the proposal cover page, table of contents, and introduction count toward the technical proposal's 200-page limit?

Response: Yes.

60. L.8.a. (4) - Technical Proposal Instructions - Can the person-loading chart required as part of the Proposed Technical Approach be provided as 11x17-inch foldout pages? If so, can each foldout page be counted as a single page relative to the technical proposal's 200-page limit?

Response: Yes.

61. L.8.a. (4) 4 - Technical Proposal Instructions - Please confirm that the experience of proposed subcontractors is to be included in the Organization/Corporate Experience section of the proposal.

Response: With respect to Organization/Corporate Experience, we are looking at the experience of the prime contractor who is submitting the proposal, not that of the subcontractors.

62. L.8.a.2 b), - Section M evaluation criterion 2 - Qualifications of Proposed Staff, Including Consultants - Section L.8.a.2 b) specifies that the offeror shall describe the experience of staff and consultants as it relates to the requirements of the acquisition. Section M evaluation criterion 2 states that resumes of key personnel and consultants will be evaluated. Is the offeror required to submit resumes for all contract positions proposed, or just the resumes of those individuals being proposed as key personnel?

Response: Resumes should be provided for all personnel including consultants showing that the offeror's staff and consultants satisfy the minimum requirements stated in Section L.8.a.2.

63. What company is the incumbent contractor and is it allowed to bid?

Response: The incumbent is Social and Scientific Systems. This requirement is full and open and thus the incumbent may submit an offer.

64. How many total FTE's does the incumbent contractor have on the project? How many are on government site and how many on contractor site?

Response: The incumbent contractor has approximately 30 people on the project. Three of them are assigned to the government site and the rest are located at the contractor's site.

65. M.3 Technical Evaluation Criteria – 1 The proposed Technical Approach. Weight is given as 45, but the total of the subcriteria is 50. Is 50 the correct weight?

Response: The proposed Technical Approach is worth 45 points.

66. M.3 Technical Evaluation Criteria – 6. Small Disadvantaged Business Participation Plan - How will offerors which are themselves small disadvantaged business be evaluated?

Response: The evaluation will be the same whether the offeror is a SDB or not. Only those offerors in the competitive range will be evaluated with respect to their SDB Participation Plan.

67. M.3 Technical Evaluation Criteria – 2. Qualifications of Proposed Staff Are the qualifications of staff working for proposed subcontractors included in this evaluation?

Response: This evaluation will include both prime and subcontractor staff whose qualifications are being used to meet the minimum requirements stated in Section L.8.a.2.

68. M.3 Technical Evaluation Criteria - 4 Organizational/Corporate Experience Is the corporate experience of proposed subcontractors included in this evaluation?

Response: No. See the answer to No. 61.

69. L.8.1 Recommended Proposal Format

Technical Approach - Database management and file construction.

The SOW gives assumptions for major tasks for each center. What information can you give us to estimate of the scope of manpower needed for

these tasks? What information can you give us to estimate the computer facilities needed for these tasks?

Response: The assumptions provided on pages 81-82 of the RFP are sufficient to estimate the manpower and computer facilities needed for these tasks.

70. L.8.1 Recommended Proposal Format

1.a. Technical Approach - Data analysis and dissemination

The SOW states "Assume that 3 analysts will be engaged full-time in simulation modeling and will require support. Are these 3 analysts contractor or government staff? In other words, is the requirement for simulation modeling with support or just the support? To what extent will the contractor be engaged in actual research and data analysis. What information can you give us to estimate the scope of manpower and computer facilities needed for these tasks?"

Response: The three analysts are government staff who will be engaged in full-time simulation modeling and will require support from the contractor. The contractor is expected to provide data management and computer programming support for this task. The assumptions provided on pages 82-83 of the RFP are sufficient to estimate the manpower and computer facilities needed for these tasks.

71. 1.c. Project Management

What procedures does HHS currently have in place for issuing tasks to the contractor? For example, is a task order method approach employed?

Response: This contract is not a task order contract.

72. 1.e. Staffing

Can you provide us with information on the current contract annual FTE's for each center for each year of the contract?

Response: The approximate distribution of the current contract's annual FTE : CFACT (20 FTE), CDOM (6.5 FTE), others (3.5 FTE).

73. Questions on facilities requirements

What computer facilities does the current contractor provide for the use of this contract, for example:

Servers

Database

Web

Network

Other servers

Workstations
Application software licensing
 SAS
 STATA
 SUDAAN
 Web development
 Other licensed software (excluding operating systems, etc.)
Web access, e.g., T1 line capacity.

Response: The current contractor provides workstations (desktop/portable PCs), LAN resources (file-sharing/print-sharing servers, backup facilities), communications links (modem lines, T1 line capacity), and application software (SAS, STATA, SUDAAN, and Web development). However, many of these resources are purchased under the contract (see the response to No. 57).

74. TOPIC: Public Use Data File Production: Regarding item C.1.7 (Public Use Data File Production) in the RFP: This section calls for two distinct types of work – (i) finalizing files received from data collection contractors for public use and (ii) preparing supplemental data files for public release.

a) Question: What is the name of the MEPS data collection contractor?

Response: WESTAT.

b) Question: What is the name of the HCUP data collection contractor?

Response: All deliverables from the HCUP data collection and processing contractor are delivered to AHRQ first. AHRQ staff provide data and documentation to the ADP contractor. The MEDSTAT Group is the current contractor for HCUP.

c) Question: How long have each of these organizations been doing the data collection work?

Response: The question is not relevant for the RFP.

d) Question: Are the MEPS and HCUP contractors required to provide all necessary documentation and, within reason, any consultative assistance to the new contractor to facilitate file preparation for public use?

Response: All necessary documentation and consultation will be provided. All deliverables are provided to AHRQ staff for MEPS and HCUP, who then interact with the data processing and programming contractor for finalizing files and preparing supplemental data files for public release.

e) Question: Reference is made to “general quality control work” on both of these files. Are the current Quality Control protocols to be strictly followed or is there an expectation that the new contractor will establish, subject to Agency approval, its own Quality Control?

Response: For both MEPS and HCUP, the expectation is that the new contractor will establish Quality Control procedures, and present them to AHRQ for approval.

- f) Question: In the last paragraph under this section, frequent reference is made to “imputation.” Is there currently an imputation process in place for all of the areas referenced collectively or for each of the areas individually, and, if so, is it expected that said will be used? If not, would the development of the imputation process/processes be a contractor responsibility and subject to Agency review and approval?

Response: The “imputation process” is currently in place. It may be updated/revised by AHRQ staff as needed. The contractor will implement the process as requested.

75. TOPIC: BENSIM: Regarding section C.3.2.2.2 in item (c) reference is made to BENSIM and the need to produce an updated version.

Question: Where can we get information about the current version of BENSIM?

Response: BENSIM, one of the main components of the MEDSIM microsimulation model, is a detailed health insurance claims processing program. It is designed to calculate insurance payments and out-of-pocket expenditures for each person in the MEDSIM population, based on specified health plan coverage provisions. The current version of BENSIM is not needed for preparation of the proposal. AHRQ staff will provide detailed specifications for the implementation of this model to the awardee who will then be responsible for producing an updated version.

76. TOPIC: Charging Outside Organizations: Regarding section C.3.3.2.3 in the RFP. Please clarify the following sentence: “The contractor shall develop appropriate arrangements to charge the outside organization or user making the request the cost associated with such special estimates or merged data tapes, and report on those arrangements within 90 days of the effective date of this contract.”

- a) Question: How can “appropriate arrangements” be made “within 90 days” if the organization or user is not known?
- b) Question: Are all organizations and users to be treated in exactly the same way?
- c) Question: Should there be built-in flexibility which can accommodate a variety of circumstances pertaining to any given situation, organization or user?

Response: Delete the request described in C.3.3.2.3 relating to development of arrangements for the offeror to charge outside organizations or users.

77. TOPIC: Transition : Regarding sections C.3.5. and C.3.5.1 (page 28 of the RFP)
Question: What obligations does the current contractor have to assure that the 60 day time frame can be met?

Response: See Section L.8.1.b of the RFP.

78. TOPIC: HIPAA Privacy Rule: We noted that there is no mention in the RFP of the HIPAA Privacy Rule (45 CFR Parts 160 and 164 Standards for Privacy of Individually Identifiable Health Information; Final Rule - Federal Register / Vol. 65, No. 250 / Thursday, December 28, 2000). We have several questions on HIPAA and AHRQ. The reason we ask these is to understand, aside from the Public Health Services Act and other legislation cited in the RFP, HIPAA regulatory requirements and constraints that could significantly impact the vendor's operations in service of AHRQ:

a) Question: Does AHRQ consider itself either a covered entity or hybrid entity under HIPAA – or has AHRQ considered this?

Response: AHRQ is not a covered entity (HHS has established itself as a hybrid entity).

b) Question: Following on from above: Is AHRQ (or appropriate departments within AHRQ) an Institutional Review Board (IRB) as defined by HIPAA?

Response: No.

c) Question: Will the vendor (the awardee of this RFP) have a business associate agreement with AHRQ? If yes, will this agreement be executed before the contract begins and/or can it be constructed as a component of the AHRQ-vendor contract?

Response: No.

d) Question: It is our impression that occasionally the vendor will be handling and disseminating information products that contain individually identifiable health information as defined by HIPAA. We base this inference on Section H2 (page 39); and Section C.1.4 (use of MEPS NHC data, page 10); as well as the use of MEPS HC, MPC and IC data. Is this correct? If we are correct, do the receivers (in other words: "AHRQ information customers") of this information have business associate agreements with AHRQ (or whatever organizational component of AHRQ deemed to be a HIPAA covered entity)?

Response: Yes. The contractor will be handling data containing individually identifiable data. Users of the MEPS microdata files are required to sign and return a Data Use Agreement. AHRQ does not enter into business associate agreements.

e) Question: A significant amount of data will be regularly received by the vendor (from NIH, CMS, and other government and non-government entities). Is this data de-identified according to HIPAA privacy standards as a matter of course?

Response: No. The vendor will receive data files that contain directly identifiable information.

- f) Question: Assuming that there is data received by the vendor containing individually identifiable health information, how are files prepared by the vendor for public use currently de-identified?

Response: Prior to public release, MEPS public use data files are stripped of all directly identifiable information. An encrypted identifier is assigned to each record and the file is then reviewed for confidentiality data disclosures (small cell sizes, rare conditions etc.).

- g) There is the statement on page 11 of the RFP that: ...HCUP databases contain patient-level information for inpatient and outpatient encounters in a uniform format which protect patient and physician privacy.

Question: How is this currently done? Is this protection in accordance with the Public Health Services Act - or - both that Act as well as HIPAA?

Response: AHRQ is not a covered entity under HIPAA. However, HCUP databases that are released to the public are essentially consistent with the Limited Data Set provision of the HIPAA privacy regulation. All outside users are required to sign a Data Use Agreement and the data elements are consistent with the LDS.

79. TOPIC: AHRQ Technology Environment Question: Can you supply us with more information on the relevant information technology environment at AHRQ? What databases and file management systems are in productive use today? Is there a central repository which contains all data? Is all data received scrubbed, transformed and loaded into common formats. What web based applications exist? Perhaps there are diagrammatic documents you can share with us that outline the technology base as it exists today? We ask this in order to propose a doable architecture approach – one that maintains the smoothness of existing operations while moving you to improved and enhanced functionality.

Response: The contractor will not be responsible for the information technology environment at AHRQ.

80. TOPIC: AHRQ Technology Architecture: Section C.1.11: The contractor will be required to propose any software workflow, document management, and other collaboration tools and products to support efficient operations of functions, processes and tasks performed under this contract. Also, the contractor shall propose any system administration and other web server and database monitoring, tuning and administration software to support efficient and high quality operations of the data processing, web site and Data Center tasks under this contract. In addition, the contractor shall propose the specifications for any other software, hardware and network components needed to support efficient data processing for this contract. These proposals should ensure the highest reasonable level of quality data processing operations, service and minimum downtime.

Question: In light of the above, and aside from the “Oracle web-enabled data base system” mentioned on page 13 of the RFP, are there any AHRQ architecturally required information technology components (hardware and/or software)? Does AHRQ have published information architecture standards with which the vendor must comply? For example: are there AHRQ standards for web publishing software products? We assume in the area of analytics that SAS products are required – correct? What are the hardware/software prerequisites for BENSIM and the other analytic applications in the RFP? (What we are essentially asking here is: how much latitude do we have in proposing software and hardware products?)

Response: Software/hardware products currently in use at AHRQ are selected based on mission requirements and need. We will consider making changes if better products are available. The contractor will be requested to systematically evaluate the MEPS web site for usability and efficiency and to propose a detailed plan for the redesign of the MEPS web site. For AHRQ’s guidelines on web product and web development, see attachment 2 (Pages 102-106).

81. TOPIC: Workflow Documentation: Section C.1.11 (exact citation as above): Can you supply us with documentation on existing workflows and related operations? We ask this in order to propose to you the best possible solutions.

Response: No.

82. TOPIC: Operational Logistics Our assumption is that AHRQ requires the vendor to have a small team on-site during business hours for operational responsibilities (e.g. inbound and outbound data processing).

- a) Question: Is this correct?
- b) Question: If we are not correct, where will the work take place? At contractor's facility, at AHRQ?
- c) Question: What, if any, are AHRQ's requirements for vendor functions/staffing on site at AHRQ?
- d) Question: What level of support in general is AHRQ expecting? For example: is the need for 24 hours a day, 7 days a week coverage or on demand; or for some other particular level of effort?
- e) Question: Based on how the contract has been executed in the past; can you tell us if travel to other AHRQ sites need to take place? If yes, can you indicate roughly how often and to where?

Response: See the responses to No. 56 and No 41.

83. TOPIC: Data & File Management Systems In Use: Section 3.1.3 (page 9): “Since 1996, the annual MEPS HC operational database consists of approximately 60 files organized in a hierarchical structure, ...”

Question: Can you tell us what database management or file system is currently used to house this data (e.g. IDMS?, VSAM files?).

Response: This data originally is stored by the data collection contractor in an Oracle database and is provided to AHRQ in SAS and/or ASCII formats. See Attachment 1 for a description of the components.

84. TOPIC: Existing HCUP Data Security: Section C 1.4 (page 12): - “They [HCUP data] are maintained on pass-word protected CDs in secured areas at AHRQ and contractor sites.”

Question: Access to the data is password protected. What is this mechanism? (e.g. is the data compressed with a PKZIP password? Are you simply referring to the fact that the data is in SAS format and is accessible only by accessing it from SAS?). In addition, is the data itself encrypted?

Response: The HCUP data is delivered to AHRQ and the ADP contractor on CDs in SAS format. The data files are password-protected SAS files. The data itself is not encrypted, although some of the variables are. For the most sensitive files in HCUP (known as data development files) the CDs are password protected and the password is known to only the PO on the data processing contract for HCUP, who provides the passwords on an as-needed basis only.

85. TOPIC: Evaluation Weights: Section M, under Technical Evaluation Criteria (Proposed Technical Approach): The sentence that reads: The 50 points will be distributed as follows:

Question: This is a typographical error, correct? We say this because the apparent weight of Proposed Technical Approach appears to be “45” and not “50”. (We’re not trying to point out any minor errors – we just want to be sure we understand your evaluation criteria)

Response: The proposed Technical Approach is worth 45 points.

86. TOPIC: Security Plan: Section F.2, (Reporting Requirements and Deliverables):
Question: what is the difference between item 4: security plan, and item 7: draft security plan? (Or are these really the same thing?)

Response: See the response to No. 3.