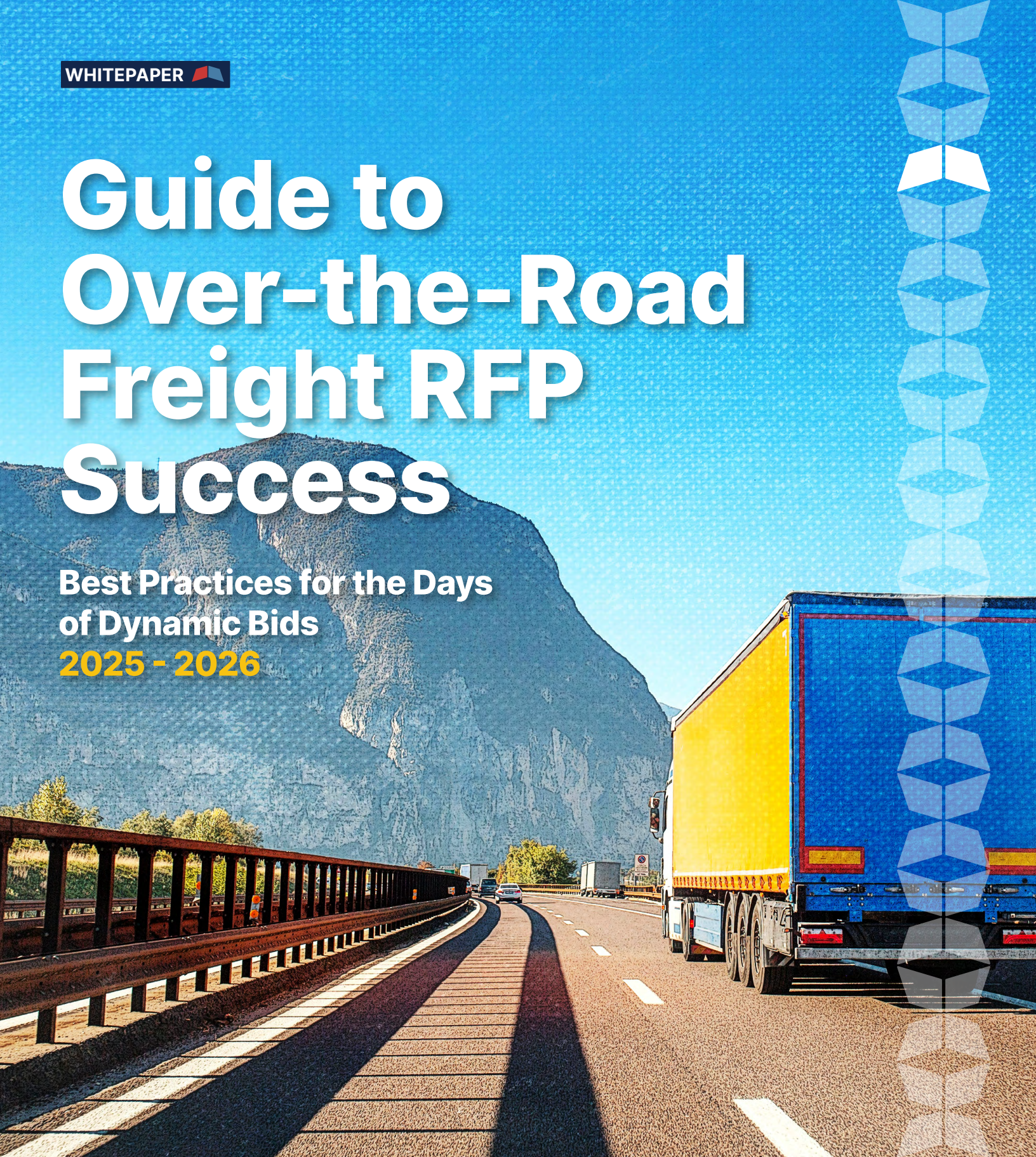


Guide to Over-the-Road Freight RFP Success

Best Practices for the Days
of Dynamic Bids
2025 - 2026



The Big Picture

Trucking freight RFPs have evolved from annual processes to dynamic, ongoing strategies. This guide provides proven best practices for securing reliable capacity and competitive rates in 2025-2026. Learn the essential steps successful shippers use to optimize their RFP processes, build stronger carrier relationships, and reach their business goals without breaking the bank.



What You'll Learn:



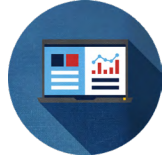
Why Annual RFPs Are Dead



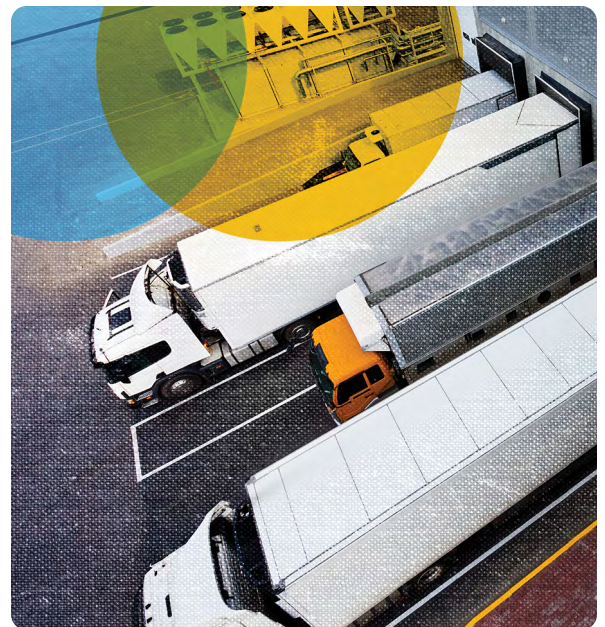
The Pre-RFP Success Checklist



7 Tactics That Deliver 95%+ Acceptance Rates



How to Measure RFP Success



The Annual RFP is Dead

(Here's What Replaced It)

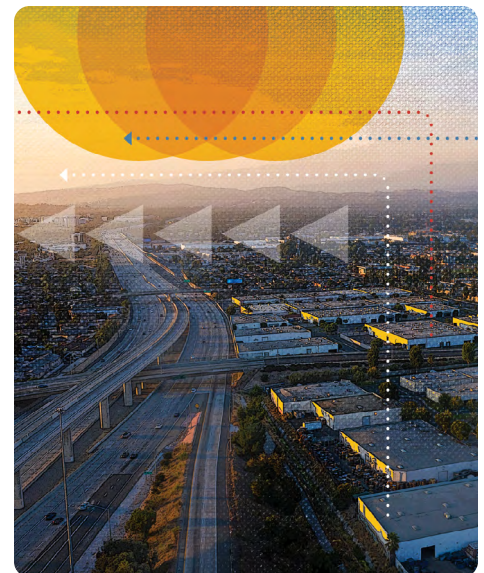


For decades, the annual transportation RFP followed a predictable rhythm. Companies would request and select bids for annual contracts in Q4 or Q1, have contracts in place by Q2, and stick with those arrangements for the entire year. It was orderly, systematic, and increasingly outdated.

Today's market volatility has completely disrupted this traditional cycle. The old approach made sense when transportation markets were relatively stable and predictable. But in an era where geopolitical events, weather disruptions, and regulatory shifts can dramatically alter carrier capacity and rates overnight, locking into year-long contracts often means getting stuck with arrangements that no longer serve your business.

What's Working Now

- ✓ **Quarterly RFPs** have become the sweet spot for many companies. This approach allows businesses to adapt to seasonal changes, market shifts, and evolving business needs without being locked into outdated terms. Companies can adjust their carrier mix and pricing every three months while still maintaining some stability for planning purposes.
- ✓ **Monthly RFPs** are gaining traction among businesses with highly volatile shipping needs or those operating in particularly unstable markets. While more resource-intensive, monthly cycles ensure rates and service levels stay current with market conditions.
- ✓ **Ad hoc "mini" RFPs** allow companies to address specific problems as they arise. Rather than waiting for the annual cycle, shippers can quickly bid out underperforming lanes, expand into new markets, or respond to capacity crunches in real-time.
- ✓ **Dynamic bidding approaches** represent the cutting edge of transportation procurement. These ongoing, flexible strategies use technology platforms to continuously optimize carrier relationships based on real-time performance data and market conditions.



Quick Decision Framework

Stable volumes and predictable demand



Annual RFPs + quarterly reviews

Volatile markets or seasonal business



Quarterly or Monthly RFPs

Cost-sensitive operations



Monthly RFPs

Tight capacity markets



"Mini-RFPs" RFPs

Rapid growth or changing lanes



Dynamic Bidding

Why Optimization Matters More Than Ever

Not surprisingly, RFPs are on everyone's mind. Yet, many shippers still adhere to the traditional cycle. RFPs have changed, and it may very well be time for shippers to change how they approach the process.

Several powerful trends have made traditional annual RFPs not just outdated, but potentially harmful to your business.

Market Volatility Is the New Normal

Transportation markets that once changed gradually now shift rapidly. Fuel price spikes, driver shortages, regulatory changes, and economic uncertainty can make a contract negotiated in January completely inappropriate by March. Given this volatility, it doesn't always make sense to lock into a contract that could be outdated three months from its execution.

Technology Creates Pressure for Optimization

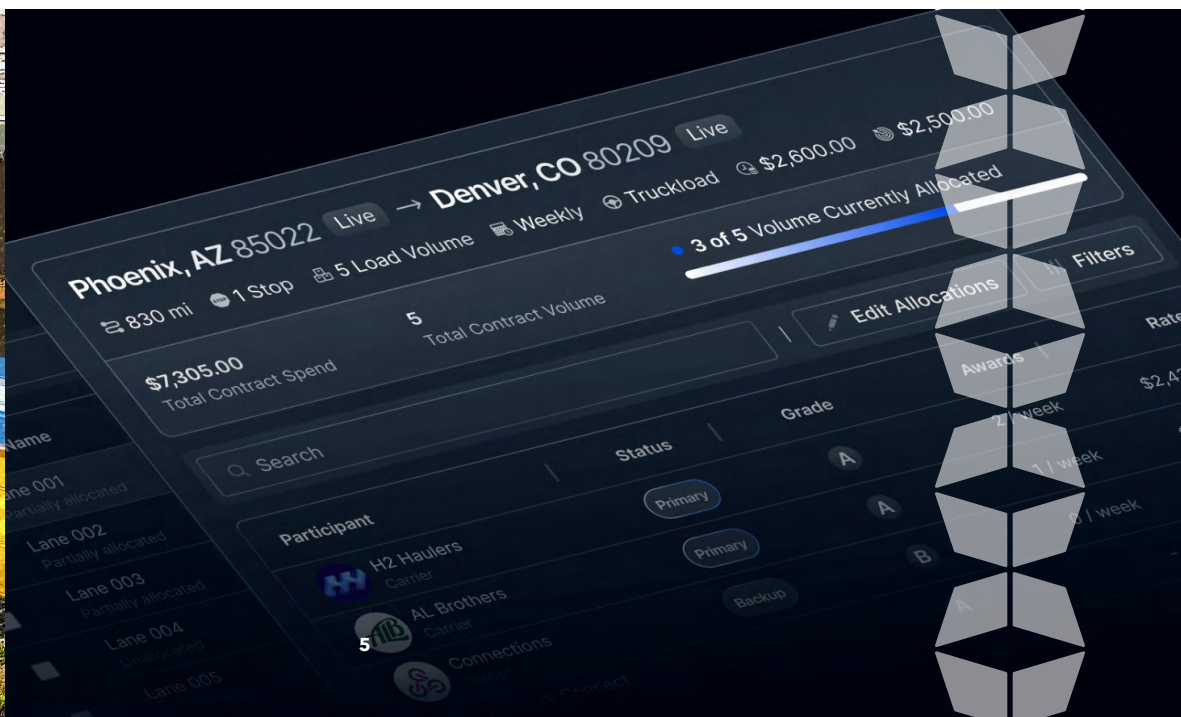
Real-time market data makes it possible to know the going spot rate and contract rate for any lane at any moment. When you can see exactly how much you're overpaying (or how much capacity you're missing), the pressure to close the gap becomes unceasing. This transparency has made yearly contracts feel sluggish and unresponsive.

Performance Data Demands Action

Your TMS now gives you weekly scorecards on carrier performance like on-time rates, tender acceptance, damages, detention charges. When you can clearly see which carriers are failing to meet expectations, waiting a full year to make changes feels irresponsible. Who wants to endure months of poor service from a carrier when you could bid out that lane next month?

RFP Platforms Remove Barriers

What used to require months of work and multiple staff members can now be completed in days using modern RFP platforms. According to RFP platform Emerge¹, the traditional bottlenecks that made frequent RFPs impractical have largely disappeared. When the process becomes this efficient, there's no reason to limit yourself to annual cycles.



Lay the Foundation for a Successful RFP



Shippers must line up reliable carriers to deliver their freight at predictable rates without trouble. That will never change. That is why the success of the RFP process is paramount to the success of shippers' transportation programs and ultimately to the wider success of the company.

The objective is to attract and secure the best options to haul your freight at the price and service level you need. Done right and you'll have the dependable transportation you need and predictable costs all companies want. Done wrong and shippers face higher than expected costs, chaos that drains internal resources, and executed routing guides that quickly become useless.



The Pre-RFP Checklist

1.

Know your objective.

Start by identifying where you stand on price and service. If your business prioritizes value, you may best target carriers offering lowest rates. If you offer a premium product, you may be justified in paying more for transportation that provides better service, performance and visibility. Know your procurement strategy going into an RFP.



2.

Know the market.

Research the historic and going spot and contract rates for the lanes you run. Stone says one of the biggest mistakes is to only look at rates from the trucks you're currently running. "Trust the data and engage with folks that have that data so you can understand your lanes and your business a little bit better," he says.



3.

Know your own data.

Tap into your TMS or spreadsheets for comprehensive and accurate volumes, projections and performance figures. Know your priority key performance indicators (KPIs) that are relevant for potential partners. Data is king, as Stone emphasizes. The more data you can provide and greater its accuracy, the higher the quality of the bids you will receive.



The winning RFP Strategy

High Quality Bids Come from High Quality RFPs

The objective of any RFP is to attract the best candidates who will fulfill your objectives and provide you with an accurate bid. Toward that end, you could just shoot a spreadsheet of your lanes to 10, 20 or even a hundred prospective carriers or freight brokers and wait for the numbers. But should you?

The problem with a bare minimum approach like that is that, while it may seem like it saves you time up front, it will likely cost your staff time answering questions from prospective partners. When it comes to evaluating bids, the responses you receive may be inconsistent because respondents who received incomplete information were forced to make made assumptions. These information gaps will also likely lead to inaccurate bids that cause problems down the road.

Presenting a well-organized RFP that provides carriers and freight brokers with comprehensive information, trust-building transparency, and helpful feedback will help create an efficient experience that delivers the bids and contracts you need.

Being exceptionally buttoned up builds credibility with carriers and freight brokers and encourages them to bid because they trust that they have a fair chance to win.



7 Best RFP Practices for Receiving the Best Bids



Put the effort into creating an excellent RFP with the help of these best practices.

1.

Create an RFP doc that sells

A mistake many shippers make is having a buyer's mindset. Taking a little time to sell the opportunity and your company can make a big difference when it comes to attracting better service providers. Here's a format for an RFP document you can email or use for an RFP platform and reuse from RFP-to-RFP with a little refreshing.

- **Company background.** Introduce what your company does and what your shipping needs are. Focus on why you're a good partner to shippers.
- **Scope of work.** Give a detailed description of requirements, including necessary certifications or special equipment. Be clear to weed out unqualified bids early.
- **Freight overview.** Provide carriers and freight brokers with the big picture. Clearly describe what is shipping, where it's picked up and delivered, when deliveries occur and other important aspects of the work required.
- **Bid detail.** Provide all the essential details for an accurate bid. Provide historic data and forecasts for freight type, volume, frequency, miles, stops and more. Present in a way that enables standardized responses that can be easily compared.
- **Additional details.** Present your policy on fuel surcharges and a full description of special requirements and accessorials.
- **Submission Guidelines:** Clearly state the deadline for RFP submissions and means (email or online portal). Provide clear instructions on the required format and procedure for submitting questions and receiving feedback.

2.

Provide the Details Essential for Pricing Freight

The better the details provided to carriers and freight brokers, the more accurately they can bid projects. Every detail matters and details that are left out can add to costs later on. "I've seen some really good ones that have site breakdowns or indicate if hi-vis is required on-site," Scott says.

Transparency is the best policy not only to prevent potential surprises once a bid is awarded, but also to save your time and carriers' time in correcting bids later in the RFP process.

"It's so valuable to have the clarity going into an RFP of knowing what a shipper's expectations are and what they're looking for in a partner."



Scott Van Zeeland
Sales Manager, WSI

Be sure and provide data related to:

- Project scope, including lane, volume, stops and freight type
- Frequency and schedule of shipments
- Appointments or open windows for pickup and delivery
- Wait time and demurrage averages
- Weekend or after-hours pickups or deliveries
- Average shipment weight, dimensions, commodity type, and packaging
- Average or target lead time provided to carriers
- Expectations and KPIs used in evaluation
- Shipment seasonality

3.

Err on the Side of RFP Transparency

Carriers and freight brokers put considerable time and effort into submitting RFPs and they have to be selective in the bids they pursue. Transparency creates trust, provides encouragement and supports their best efforts.

Be transparent about the number of rounds, your selection process and the timeline. Let bidders know what to expect and instill confidence in your process by adhering to the schedule.

“In the best RFPs, shippers are very upfront and will say there’s going to be two rounds. Round one ends on this date, round two ends on this date. After round one, we’re going to tell you what the baseline rate is on the given lane. And then after round two, we’ll make the awards,” explains David Stone, Sr. Director of Transportation at WSI.

Providing feedback after round one is a tremendous value to all parties, Stone adds. “Maybe the baseline rate is \$600.00 all-in, or maybe it’s a cost per mile that we want to get to or under. There needs to be some type of baseline that I can reference. If you can give that to me, I’m going to give you much better results than if you just turn around and say, ‘bid on this’ and I have no idea what it is.”

In addition to providing an opportunity to sharpen bids, provide clarification, make corrections or pull-out in good faith, feedback keeps bidders engaged. It’s as important to keep them invested in the process as it is to draw their bid in the first place.

Even carriers that don’t end up your primary can fill the important role of being a secondary or global carrier to you. You never know, and if you treated bidders squarely, they may be there to help you someday when you’re pressed for capacity.

4.

Focus on a Limited Number of Qualified Candidates

When it comes to deciding who to invite to bid, incumbents are a natural. Re-upping with someone who knows your business is most efficient and saves onboarding costs.

When expanding the pool of prospective partners, look to referrals, industry associations, and market research. Establishing clear requirements for viable carrier-partners will help in winnowing the list of invitees. Scott Van Zeeland, Transportation Sales Manager at WSI advises creating a list of 10 – 20 that includes carriers and freight brokers.

Reviewing more RFPs than that creates an unnecessary burden on staff. It also leaves less time for personal interaction with the invitees. Van Zeeland says this step is one of the most important of all for finding providers that are the right fit.

5.

Be Organized to Be Successful

The manual, spreadsheet-driven RFP is on the way out.

Today about 51% of RFPs are submitted through RFP platforms, according to a report by RFP response experts, Loopio.²

Van Zeeland agrees, “I’m a big fan of the platform. Shippers that use them are by far the most organized. The RFP platforms that are out there are a central house for all the documentation that we need and can refer to. The good ones list what their fuel program is, and the site has the rules, the dates, and the timelines. So anytime there’s a question I can refer to that platform and find the answer in the documents that they’ve provided.”

An RFP platform or partnering with a managed transportation provider that handles the whole RFP is a far better alternative to spreadsheets, he adds.



6.

Vet Carefully in Today's Fraud-Ridden Environment

Freight fraud ranks higher on the list of concerns among shippers than ever before and incidents of **cargo theft have increased 1,500% since 2021**, according to Transportation Intermediaries Association's recent report.³

Stone emphasizes the importance of vetting carrier candidates today during the RFP process. "The biggest thing that I've been coaching shippers on is that you need to have some way of validating who your carrier partners are now because fraud is so rampant.

"If they're partnering with a brokerage, they need to partner with the brokerage that has the tools necessary to prevent fraud. It better be on the truck that the person says they are putting it on, and you better be able to validate that through visibility."

He says the risk for fraud increases when shippers embrace a lowest cost strategy. "As a shipper, if you turn around and go lowest price or go with a different carrier that maybe isn't vetted out, you run the risk of losing your freight or getting your freight held hostage. That is a major concern today. You may save a couple bucks, but you may pay for it in cargo claims after the fact."

7.

Meet Candidates Earlier Rather Than Later

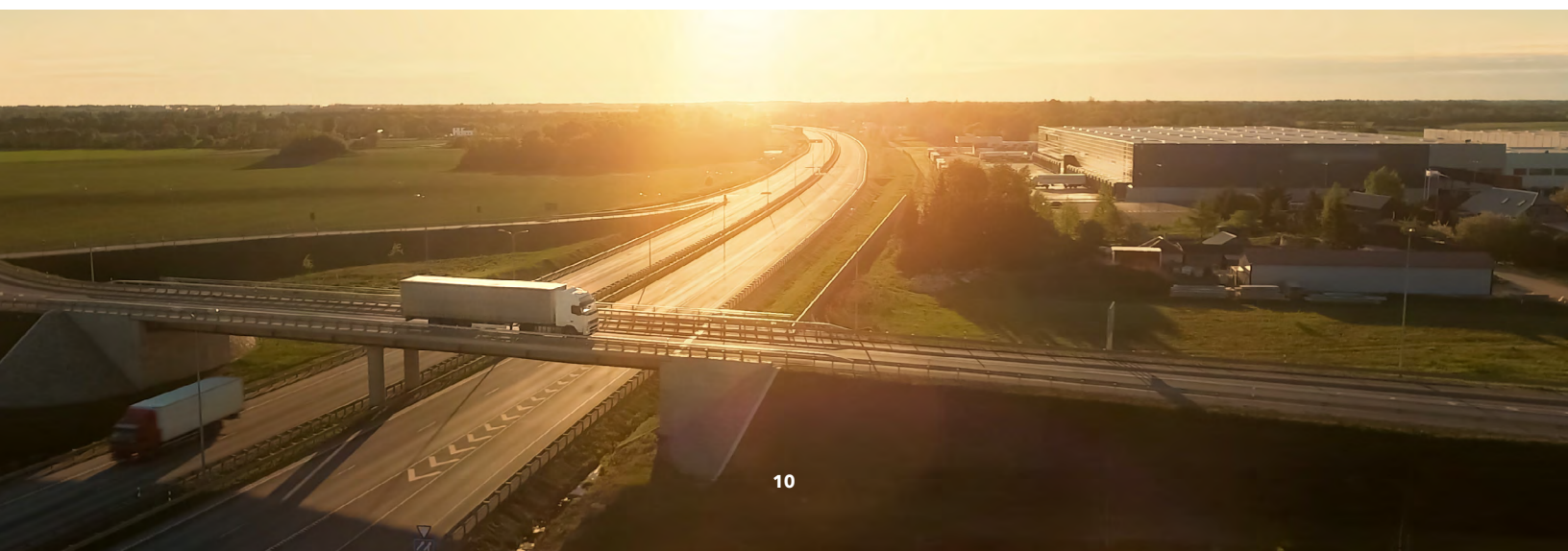
Postponing a personal meeting until after the second round of an RFP is a commonly accepted practice, but it has its drawbacks.

It's an important meeting where a personal connection is formed. It shouldn't be rushed, but in the heat of round two of an RFP, the meeting is often shortchanged, Van Zeeland says. Shipper-carrier or shipper-freight broker success hinges on communication and the strength of relationships. To build the foundation, Van Zeeland tries to arrange a short introduction meeting at least a month before the frenzy of the RFP begins.

"It's so important for a broker or carrier to know what's important to a shipper and just be able to ask them: Is it availability? Is it same-day pickups?"

He also recommends having target conversations ahead of the RFP. If you have the opportunity to ask, "Where do you want to be with this?" then at least you have the opportunity to get to it. Otherwise you're just guessing.

"To be successful, I've found that the relationship is the biggest variable. Success with freight hinges on the accountability of your partners. For shippers, it's knowing that when they have a hard ask, they can go to a carrier and be confident it's covered."



What a Successful RFP Looks Like



Whether your RFP was successful or not points back to the procurement strategy the shipper started with. Whether you are a value brand with a low-cost strategy, a high-end manufacturer that values service, or somewhere in between, your procurement strategy should support your business model.

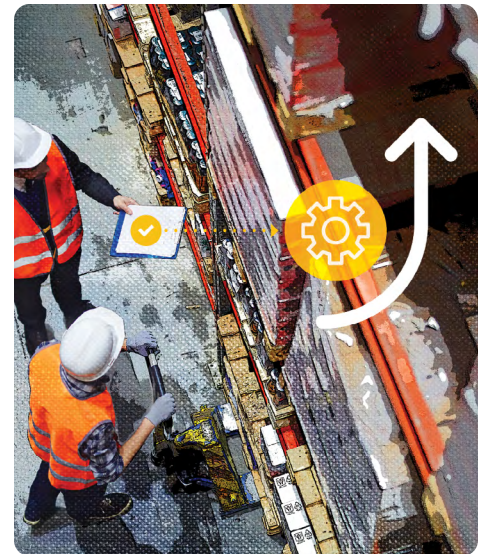
The truest measure of success is whether the contracts you've negotiated go the distance. **"If you have 95% or above prime tender acceptance at the end of your RFP on every load, that's a win.** You picked the right carriers and the right partners to come in and do that," Stone says.

He adds that on-time pickup and on-time delivery are the other key measures of success. "If you're averaging above, 95% or 98% on-time pickup and on-time delivery out of an RFP season, that's a win, too."

The third measure of whether an RFP was a success, according to Stone, is simply asking dispatchers and shipping managers at the warehouses how providers did. It speaks volumes about whether the right carriers and freight brokers were chosen. Were they on time? Were they prepared with the tie-down straps, tarps or other required equipment? If so, the right service levels are in place.

RFPs form the basis of routing guides. With the right routing guides in place with primary, secondary and global carriers in place, appointments are kept and things run efficiently.

That brings us to a significant measure of RFP success: how efficient the process is for internal staff. Did the RFP distract them from other core duties? Did the process attract good providers and lead to good decision-making?



- ✓ **95%+ prime tender acceptance on every load**
- ✓ **95%+ on-time pickup and delivery**
- ✓ **Positive dispatcher feedback**
- ✓ **Efficient internal process**
- ✓ **Strong routing guides with primary, secondary & global carriers**



Don't Wait for the Next Annual Cycle—Start Optimizing Now

The future of transportation procurement belongs to companies that can move as fast as their markets. Static annual contracts are becoming a competitive liability, while dynamic, data-driven approaches are creating real advantages. WSI's transportation experts have guided hundreds of companies through this transition, and the results speak for themselves: better rates, stronger relationships, and the flexibility to thrive in any market condition. Your transportation program can be a strategic asset—not just a cost center.

About WSI

WSI (Warehouse Specialists, LLC) is a leading 3PL provider delivering reliable warehousing, fulfillment and transportation solutions nationwide. Through its transportation division (WSI Freight Solutions, LLC) the company provides brokerage services, including LTL, FTL, and specialized freight solutions. With the perfect mix of people, processes, and technology, WSI empowers retailers and manufacturers to build strategic carrier partnerships that deliver reliable results.

¹ <https://www.freightwaves.com/news/identifying-how-and-when-to-build-rfps-all-year-long>

² <https://loopio.com/blog/rfp-statistics-win-rates/>

³ <https://member.tianet.org/common/Uploaded%20files/MemberResourceLibrary/Whitepapers/TIA-Fraud-Report-April-2025.pdf>