



Statement of Requirements

Procurement Unique Identifier: PIEC0003935

RFQ Title: Ballot paper scanning assurance

RFQ Closing Date and Time: 8 March 2024 , 5pm

Directorate: ACT Electoral Commission

Contact Officer Name: Jiv Sekhon

Contact Officer Email:

The ACT Government as represented by ACT Electoral Commission is seeking proposals from the Professional and Consulting Services Panel suppliers (Suppliers) to engage the successful Supplier (Contractor) for the provision of services as described in this Request for Quotation (RFQ).

In submitting a response, potential Suppliers are required to comply with all requirements set out in this RFQ and if successful, agree to enter a Work Order issued under the Professional and Consulting Services Panel Deed (Contract).

Statement of Requirement

A.A.1 KEY DETAILS

RFQ Dates and Times

Issue date:	23 February 2024
Closing date and time:	Refer to closing date and time detailed in the VendorPanel Request.
Question closing time:	Refer to closing date for questions detailed in the VendorPanel Request.

Work Order Dates

Expected Start date:	5 August 2024
Contract Term:	Three months
Contract Extension Option:	Extension of Two Period(s) each of One month

A.A.2 THRESHOLD ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

Threshold criteria

Not applicable

A.A.3 THE REQUIREMENT

Background (if required for context)

Refer to detailed requirements in Attachment A

Required Services

Refer to detailed requirements in Attachment A

A.A.3 (a) Standards

Standards

Not applicable

Environmental Considerations

Not applicable

Key Performance Indicators (KPI)

Not applicable

A.A.3 (b) Security

Personnel employed by the Supplier must provide evidence of completion of a criminal history background check (Nationally Coordinated Criminal History Check) and must sign a declaration of confidentiality and political neutrality prior to the engagement.

A.A.3 (c) Workplace Health and Safety

Contractor must be aware of, and when required, comply with the Work Health and Safety Act 2011.

A.A.3 (d) Key Deliverables

Details of milestone instructions are as follows:

- A rehearsal of the ballot paper scanning assurance process will be required to be held in approximately August 2024. The rehearsal will involve a small number of ballot papers that have been scanned, digitally captured with preferences verified. The supplier will then undertake a rehearsal of the assurance process. This is likely to consume approximately ½ day.
- ‘Production’ delivery of the ballot paper scanning assurance process. Conducted between 22 October and 26 October 2024 on premises at the office of Elections ACT. Each day of ballot paper assurance will commence at 9am and conclude at 5pm, with the potential to run up until 7pm if all selected batches have not been fully processed by the auditors.

A.A.3 (e) Meetings and Reporting

Meeting Requirements

The suppliers are required to attend the following meetings:

Type	Attendees	Frequency / When	Method
Rehearsal	Supplier and Elections ACT staff	August 2024	On premises – Elections ACT
Progress	Supplier and Elections ACT staff	As required	Mutually agreed

Reporting Requirements

Description	Indicative date for delivery
Final audit report	Friday 8 November 2024

A.A.3 (f) Territory Information

- Australian Bureau of Statistics – Sample size for a Ballot Paper Scanning Assurance Plan for ACT Legislative Assembly elections
- Elections ACT ballot paper assurance plan
- Ballot paper scanned images
- Digital preference data

A.A.3 (g) Pricing

Potential Suppliers are required to provide detailed pricing showing how the total Contract price in the proposal has been calculated under the Suppliers Panel Deed’s capped rates, including allocation of proposed staff against the Suppliers Panel Deed’s classification level.

A.A.4 REQUEST FOR QUOTATION (RFQ) DISTRIBUTION

This RFQ and any updates will be distributed by via VendorPanel. Potential Suppliers may refer to VendorPanel article for [How Suppliers View/Download a Request](#) for more information.

Any questions relating to this RFQ must be directed through the VendorPanel Ask a Question function. Potential Suppliers may refer to VendorPanel article for [How Suppliers ask the buyer a Question against a Request](#) for more information.

A.A.5 LODGEMENT METHOD

Proposals should be lodged via VendorPanel by the closing date and time specified in the VendorPanel Request. Refer to VendorPanel articles for more information [Responding to Requests](#) for more information.

A.A.6 CUSTOMER'S CONTACT OFFICER

Refer to the contact details provided on the VendorPanel request.

COMPLAINTS HANDLING

A Tenderer who wishes to make a complaint about a procurement activity must follow the process outlined in the ACT Government Supplier Complaints Management Procedure. This procedure can be accessed from the ACT Procurement website at [Supplier and Tenderer Complaints - Procurement ACT](#)

Any complaints relating to this procurement should, in the first instance, be referred to the Customer's Contact Officer.

A.A.7 DRAFT ADDITIONAL CONTRACT TERMS

Not applicable

Attachment A – Detailed Specifications

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Background

The ACT Electoral Commission (the Commission) uses a ballot paper scanning system (BPSS) to scan and digitally capture voter preferences from paper ballots including postal votes, declaration votes and ordinary votes issued at a polling place. The BPSS was established at the 2008 ACT Legislative Assembly election.

At the central scrutiny centre, starting on the Sunday after polling day, formal ballot papers for each polling place are batched into batches of 100 papers. Each batch is allocated a batch header with a unique batch number related to that polling place. Each batch is then scanned and imaged, and the image read by intelligent character recognition (ICR) software.

The ICR software interprets the preferences shown, and the Robson rotation version number printed, on each ballot paper. The scanning system uses a range of strategies to ensure that preferences are captured with 100% accuracy. After each batch of ballot papers is scanned, Elections ACT operators are presented with an 'out of context' image of each preference number on each ballot paper, and conduct an initial validation check on the accuracy of the scanned results (for example, by checking every "1" on every ballot paper, every "2" on every ballot paper, and so on).

After this initial check, the ICR software applies a set of business rules to each ballot paper. Those ballot papers that the ICR software interprets with a high degree of certainty pass the business rules check and are automatically admitted for counting. Any ballot papers which have unclear numbers or numbers in dispute, or do not pass the business rule check (for example having a break in the sequence of numbers, or appearing to be informal), are flagged as requiring the verification of an Elections ACT officer.

The Elections ACT officer investigates each ballot paper requiring verification by comparing the on-screen image of the ballot paper with the ICR interpretation of the preferences on the original ballot paper to determine whether there has been any error in scanning, interpretation, or validation.

The Elections ACT officer corrects any identified errors in scanning, interpretation, or validation on the computer system. If necessary, the officer views the physical ballot paper if the scanned image is not sufficient to resolve any doubt.

If an Elections ACT officer changes a record of a vote on-screen, that change must be verified by a second Elections ACT officer.

Scrutineers are entitled to observe the scanning, validation, and verification processes, and where a scrutineer believes that a ballot paper has been incorrectly interpreted, the interpretation can be challenged. Challenged ballot papers are re-examined by a senior electoral official.

The above process continues until all formal paper ballots have been scanned and all ballot papers verified.

Once all scanned ballot papers are verified, the preference data from those ballot papers is transferred to the electronic voting and counting system (eVACS), where the data is combined with the results of the electronic voting, and the computer program distributes preferences under the ACT's Hare-Clark electoral system.

All ballot papers identified at the manual count at the polling place as informal are manually rechecked at the central scrutiny centre. Any papers ruled at that stage to be formal are added to a

new batch and scanned as formal. Ballot papers confirmed as informal are also scanned but their markings are not recorded in the system.

Ballot paper scanning assurance

Historically, Elections ACT has always conducted an assurance process that examines the accuracy of the scanning process by comparing the digital image with the preferences exported to the eVACS system. This is generally done post-election using a random sample of 3,000 ballot paper images (600 per electorate). This process has not found an error in the last three ACT Legislative Assembly Elections.

As a further transparency measure, Elections ACT intends to deploy the ballot paper scanning assurance process live during the 2024 ballot paper scrutiny. The live scrutiny will occur in the same location and at the same time as the ballot paper scanning process; comparing the physical ballot papers, with the digital image of the ballot paper and the digital preferences to be exported to the eVACS system.

The ballot paper scanning assurance process may be inspected by scrutineers at the counting centre where the scrutiny is being conducted. The assurance process will use an external Contractor to conduct the assurance process using an ICT system developed by Elections ACT.

The assurance process will examine formal ballot papers only and is intended as a publicly viewable process to ensure the preferences captured by the BPSS and imported into EVACS for counting are accurate. A sample of scanned ballot papers will be audited in accordance with statistical advice on sampling from the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Audit preparation

Elections ACT will perform the following tasks:

1. On day one of scanning, ballot papers will be batched, scanned, verified and at the end of the day preference data for committed batches will be extracted by the BPSS vendor and provided to an Elections ACT officer.
2. At the same time, an export of ballot paper images for committed batches will also be exported by the BPSS vendor and provided to Elections ACT.
3. On the morning of the second day of scanning, an Elections ACT officer will upload the preference data and images into Election ACT's election management system (EMS) – ballot paper auditing module.
4. Immediately after the upload, the Elections ACT officer will be prompted to enter a random seed into the system. This seed will be generated outside the EMS by Elections ACT staff using a randomisation device (this process is publicly viewable). A new seed is generated daily with each upload.
5. Elections ACT will use the ballot paper auditing system to open a new daily audit for each electorate. The Elections ACT officer will select the number of batches to be audited that day and enter the seed to be applied for that day. The randomisation algorithm will identify random batches and the random starting paper in each batch. Each randomly selected batch will have five papers audited from it starting from the randomly selected starting paper and progressing sequentially for the next four papers. The total number of batches to be selected depends on a daily target, which in turn is based on the statistical advice provided by the ABS on the overall sample number for each electorate.
6. The system then generates electorate-based reports listing the batches selected for auditing for that day and lists the starting paper ballot paper in each batch. Elections ACT staff will use that report to physically identify the batches to be audited, isolate them, and flag the

starting paper in each batch. For convenience, batches will be physically grouped by electorate.

Auditing

The Contractor will perform the following tasks:

1. The Contractor will verify that all batches have been provided by Elections ACT in accordance with the reports.
2. The Contractor will then log in to the EMS-ballot paper auditing module and navigate to the open audits section.
3. The Contractor will then select a relevant daily electorate audit and navigate to all unaudited batches and select the first batch they will audit.
4. The Contractor will then bring up the starting paper in that batch and compare the physical paper with the scanned image. Once it is confirmed that the paper and the image are replicas, the auditor will then compare the preferences written on the digital image with the digitally recorded preferences that have been derived following the verification process (the digital preferences are listed in a panel to the left of the ballot paper's digital image on the EMS screen for easy comparison).
5. The Contractor will then confirm that no errors are present by marking the paper as successfully audited via a tick button. Alternatively, if an error is identified, marking the paper as including an error, selecting from a pre-defined set of reasons for the error and recording further details as necessary.
6. For errors identified, the Contractor will be required to physically flag the ballot paper and batch to enable the Deputy Commissioner to physically review these ballot papers at the end of each day. The Deputy Commissioner will conduct the confirmation review logging into a personal EMS account, assessing the error paper and confirming or rejecting the finding, in the presence of Contractor personnel.
7. All changes in the ballot paper auditing module are logged and auditable. Once the Contractor has reviewed one ballot paper, they will navigate to the next paper and finish reviewing all five papers in that batch before proceeding to the next batch in turn.
8. The Contractor will review all papers allocated for completion for each electorate on each day.

The above tasks will be repeated each day until the final day of scanning, which is typically the Saturday following Election Day.

On that final day, the Contractor may be required to perform an ad-hoc audit to achieve an overall statistical target for ballot papers to be audited for a given electorate.

An ad-hoc batch audit selects batches and starting papers randomly from the entire pool of electorate ballot papers (which have not already been audited).