INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SERVICES
A GUIDE TO SUCCESSFUL SOFTWARE ACQUISITION

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1.0 Planning and Requirements Gathering

a. **Obtain initial Executive support**
b. **Identify stakeholders.** These individuals will be the project team, responsible for helping to define the problem and then researching, selecting and assisting in the implementation. Include your IT folks as early as possible in any technology initiative.
c. **Define the problem.** What is the problem you're trying to solve? Define *your* problem and then compile a list of what is needed from a software product to resolve the problem. This will help you to stay focused on what YOU need and avoid being derailed by what a vendor *wants* you to need.

2.0 Research Solutions

a. **Talk to your peers.** User groups, your counterparts at other CSUs, colleagues at other colleges and universities are all great resources to learn more about how similar problems may have been solved. Remember to ask about process *and* software solutions and why they made the decisions that they did. This will help you to refine the requirements list to include needs you might not have considered.
b. **Talk to your campus IT resources.** ITS is here to help! Consulting your IT resources will help you to reach a better outcome; they can ask the more technical questions you may not have considered, and can help advise whether a project request will be necessary to move forward. In addition, it can often be the case that a solution to your problem already exists in a product currently in use on campus that can be adapted to meet your needs. This is another great reason to involve your IT folks early; they'll know whether a solution to your problem is already available. This is particularly true where PeopleSoft data is involved. You'll also need to talk with the Information Security office if your project will involve Level 1 or Level 2 data (see: https://www.humboldt.edu/its/security-dataclassificationstandards for definitions).
c. **Use the Internet.** Search for products that might meet your needs using your key requirements.
d. **Create a product evaluation matrix.** Using your requirements list and any potential solutions you have found, create a matrix that will serve as a tool for comparing solutions equally against your needs. Appendix A provides an example matrix and includes questions ITS recommends should be part of every product evaluation.
e. **Be consistent!** When you start talking to vendors, you should ask the same questions of each company. Make sure the same stakeholder group attends each vendor conversation or demonstration. Having everyone hear the same thing will save time in the long run and help prevent the need to re-check information. You may also want to agree a list of supplementary questions across the group.
f. **Conduct generic vendor demonstrations.** Identify a list of vendors to conduct generic demonstrations, for example something they would present at a conference, for your stakeholder audience. It is important that no vendor be given unfair advantage. Any demonstrations or conversations conducted prior to publishing a request for vendor response may not be specific to HSU or give any vendor information that another vendor would not have.

In accordance with CSU policy, the HSU software acquisition process must observe fair and open competition to the maximum extent possible. These generic demonstrations will help you to refine your business requirements, as they will often bring to light functionality you'd not considered, help to refine the potential vendor list, and provide a ballpark estimate of the likely costs.

g. **First Executive support check-point.** At this point, you should have a much more well-defined idea of what your solution will look like and a rough idea of costs. Use this information to check in on available budget and approval to move forward.

3.0 The Path to Purchase

The information below will help you to identify the path your software acquisition will take. Note that this information does *not* apply to the acquisition of IT Consulting Services if these are to be purchased separately from the software. This information also does not replace guidance from the HSU Office of Contracts, Procurement & Risk Management (see http://www.humboldt.edu/procurement/index.html) or compliance with the CSU Policy Manual for Contracting & Procurement, available online at http://www.calstate.edu/CSP/crl/policy/Policy.shtml .

In **every** case, you should use your needs list to define the required functionality, to evaluate proposed solutions, and to select your product.

3.1 Expenditure Limits

a. **Acquisitions valued at less than $50,000:** Can be made without issuing a Request for Quote or Request for Proposal so long as the price is deemed to have met fair and reasonable standards. This may be determined by an established or verifiable catalog or market pricing medium published by a responsible supplier, by obtaining and documenting quotations within the past 18 months from other responsible suppliers, or by being able to demonstrate that other transactions occurring in the last 18 months showed similar pricing for similar acquisitions. A Sole Source-Brand justification (see 3.2.d below) is not required for purchases of less than $50,000.

b. **Acquisitions valued at $50,000 or greater:** Consult the Office of Contracts, Procurement & Risk Management at (707) 826-3512. A variety of options is available, depending on the cost, the type of vendor (small business, presence of Master Enabling Agreement with the CSU, sole-source provider for a specific product) and the degree to which you have defined the problem requiring a solution - all factors that drive the documentation and bid solicitation requirements. Involve Procurement early and absolutely before you begin HSU-specific meetings with vendors.

3.2 Types of Vendor Solicitation Documents

a. **Request for Information (RFI):** Used when you think you know what you want but need more information from the vendors. Will typically be followed by an RFQ or RFP.

b. **Request for Quote (RFQ):** Commonly used when you know what you want but need information on how vendors would meet your requirements and how much it will cost; you may also include the criteria against which each vendor's response will be evaluated. An RFQ can also be used when you have all details except the cost; in this case, the vendor selection would be based on solely on price.

c. **Request for Proposal (RFP):** Used when you know you have a problem but don't know how you want to solve it. This is the most formal of the "Request for" processes and has strict procurement rules for content, timeline and vendor responses. See Appendix B (http://www.humboldt.edu/its/sites/its/files/docs/po-docs/Software%20Selection%20Process%20February%202012%20Appendix%20B.pdf) on the ITS website for a sample of commonly used sections in development of an RFP. See Appendix C (http://www.humboldt.edu/its/sites/its/files/docs/po-docs/Software%20Selection%20Process%20February%202012%20Appendix%20C.pdf) on the ITS website for an example of the timeline requirements for an RFP.

d. **Sole Source Purchases:** Sole source purchases require completion of the campus Sole Source-Brand Justification form and approval by the Director of Contracts, Procurement & Risk Management. With approval of a sole source-brand purchase, you can move forward with the purchase process. Situations when a sole source-brand can be considered include:

- The product is unique and essential to the CSU's requirements, thereby precluding consideration of a product manufactured by another company, or
- The product is required to match other similar product already in place and the use of an alternate product would cause the CSU to incur substantial additional costs, or
- The sole source-brand product is required for the immediate preservation of the public health, welfare, or safety, or the protection of CSU property and programs.

3.3 Evaluating Vendor Proposals (except for awards based on price)

The Project Team must evaluate all responses equally against the requirements list. Identify at least three providers that most closely meet your requirements and invite those vendors to conduct online or onsite "customized for HSU" demonstrations. These differ from the generic demonstrations in that they are specific to HSU and the defined requirements and are now permitted because the published Request for (Information / Quote / Proposal) has provided all responding vendors with the same details. Most importantly, a customized demonstration gives you the best insight into how each vendor will solve your problem, enabling you to find the best match.

Prepare a justification supporting the selection of vendors for the demonstration sessions; this may be more informal in the case of an RFQ or, in the case of an RFP, will involve a formal scoring process as outlined in the RFP. The Office of Contracts, Procurement and Risk Management will require the justifications and scoring before providers can be invited to demonstrate their proposed solution.

Second Executive support checkpoint. This is also the time to check in with your Executive Sponsor and discuss the results of your proposal evaluations, proposed costs and product comparisons as well as plans for vendor demonstrations, including the proposed audience.

With continued Executive support and Procurement's OK, issue invitations to the selected vendors to set up a demonstration, clearly outlining the requirements for the demonstrations, the agenda, and required vendor participants.

3.4 Conduct Customized Vendor Demonstrations

While online demonstrations are appropriate for smaller budget, short time-frame projects, you should aim for an on-campus demonstration from the vendor whenever possible. Larger budget and/or scope projects are best evaluated from high-level demonstrations and individual sessions with representatives from the impacted project areas. This provides not only a deeper understanding of the proposed solution but also an opportunity to build a relationship with the prospective vendor and their proposed project team. A sample agenda could include the product demonstration, followed by individual meetings with members of the project team in the following areas: functional, technical, project & implementation management, and training. It is advisable to also plan for a meeting with the Office of Contracts, Procurement & Risk Management to determine whether the vendor may be looking to incorporate any exceptions to the CSU Terms & Conditions into the final contract.

Prepare a survey for demonstration participants so that you can obtain feedback on the product and the vendor. Request that at least one member from each individual work session provide feedback on their respective meeting(s). This will be important in your final selection and may also help define any expanded use of the product.

3.5 Check Vendor References

Identify the customer references that most closely match your situation and spend some time investigating their degree of satisfaction with both the product and the vendor's services. Include both new and longer term customers to gain a fuller perspective. Create a reference check worksheet to record your findings; this can also be emailed to any reference that prefers to provide a written response. See Appendix D (http://www.humboldt.edu/its/sites/its/files/docs/po-docs/Software%20Selection%20Process%20February%202012%20Appendix%20D.pdf) on the ITS website for an example reference checklist. In larger scale projects and if welcomed by the reference site, a visit to that site will provide even greater insight into the benefits of the solution.

3.6 Select a Solution

Review the demonstration survey results and the feedback from the individual sessions. Review and update the justification document so that it accurately reflects the team's assessment of the vendors after the demonstration and provides support for your vendor selection. This

information will be retained by the Office of Contracts, Procurement & Risk Management for reference in the event of questions or protests from other vendors.

Final Executive support checkpoint. Meet with your Executive Sponsor as a final check before requesting approval from Procurement to begin the contract award process. Discuss the final results of demonstrations, reference checks and the reason this vendor was selected, and re-confirm Executive support for the project.

With Executive support and the appropriate approvals from Procurement, if you were working through an RFP you could now issue a Notice of Intent to Award the contract to the selected vendor and notice of non-selection to all other vendors that responded to your request. You can also begin contract and Statement of Work negotiations with the vendor and Procurement; if your project involves Level 1 or 2 data and/or the data will be hosted offsite, the Information Security Office should also be part of the contract review. In the case of an RFP, at least 5 business days must pass from the date of the Notice of Intent to Award before the contract can be issued. With a less formal RFI or RFQ, no Notice of Intent to Award is required and you can move straight to a Contract Award and issue the notices of non-selection. Once a signed contract and all requested documents have been received by Procurement (for example, proof of insurance, if applicable), you're now ready to begin the implementation process!

Appendix A – Example of a Product Evaluation Matrix

The example below relates to the search for a tutor scheduling application; your questions will obviously be specifically related to your own proposed acquisition. The questions in bold type at the top of the matrix are ones ITS recommends be included in all product evaluations.

	PRODUCT 1	**PRODUCT 2**	**PRODUCT 3**
PRIMARY FUNCTIONAL REQUIREMENTS			
Will the product be installed on campus or hosted off-site?			
Which of the following security protocols does the product support: Shibboleth, LDAP, CAS, PeopleSoft security roles and permission lists?			
What type of data (Level 1, 2 and/or 3) will be involved?			
PeopleSoft compatibility and with which version(s), e.g. HCM 9.0			
Search capabilities - by tutor, students, subject and specific courses			
Ability to maintain tutor profiles by subjects (skill set), hours available, max numbers available, hours not available, max number of clients per session.			
Ability to maintain tutee profiles with student name, ID #, home phone, cell phone, HSU email address, affiliation (sourced from PeopleSoft); course subject matter/specific affiliations			
Ability to build tutor schedules, matching tutee needs to available competent tutor			
Ability to view tutor's schedule to determine where they are booked, how many students and who the students are			
Ability to support individual or multiple students within a single tutor session			
Ability to send automatic reminders to tutors and tutees			
Reports of real-time data and trend analysis for # of tutees served in any given period by subject (recognizing the data is as scheduled not as delivered)			

Web interface for entering confirmation of service delivery by both tutee and tutor.			
Tiered security based on login to distinguish Tutor Center Administrators, data entry, tutors, tutees.			
Ease of branding (using HSU graphic identity standards)			
OPERATIONAL SPECIFICS			
Time to implement			
Annual time required for maintenance			
Cost to implement			
Annual cost to maintain			
Additional hardware costs			
If web-based, compatible with which versions of which browsers			
ATI compliance status			
Voluntary Product Accessibility Template (VPAT) availability			
Reference sites available			
"NICE TO HAVES"			
Ability to record services delivered in the Tutor tracking system and push results to PeopleSoft			
Ability to interface with course schedule in PeopleSoft			
Mobile version of web interface for confirmation of services.			
Ability to request services online (interface to Adobe form? From within Tutor system?)			
Link from Student Center to Tutor tracking system for requesting or confirming services.			
TECHNICAL NOTES			
PeopleSoft modifications required			
Do other CSU's have a modification we can leverage?			
Time required for modification development / maintenance			
Single sign-on access on campus?			