

How to Sell Tutoring Services to Schools and Districts



Introduction:

Winning school and district contracts can provide your tutoring company with an important new source of revenue that can help your business scale and grow. School and district work can be very satisfying, and in many cases allows you the opportunity to launch large scale programs that provide services to hundreds of students. School and district work is also very competitive and can be logistically challenging. The following strategy guide provides insights into how our company secured over 250 large-scale tutoring contracts with schools, districts, and community organizations that allowed us to serve over 15,000 students and generate over 12M in revenue. While student outcome data has been a key to earning all of our contracts, there are some other important strategies that you'll need to master in order to compete in this area. In this guide, we will discuss how to identify school and district opportunities, how to contact key decision-makers, how to respond to Requests for Proposal (RFPs), and how to best position yourself in order to land school and district contracts.

Understanding School and District Needs

Many schools and districts have their own tutoring programs, as they have access to credentialed teachers, student diagnostic data, and grant funding. In addition, they have in-depth experience with their school and district needs. So why would a school or district be interested in contracting with an outside tutoring agency to provide academic services for their students? Here are a few reasons:

1. **Overwhelming Need:** Many schools and districts, particularly low-income Title 1 districts, have such large scale needs that their own staff are unable to handle the number of needy students. For these districts, contracting with outside providers is preferable to handling it internally with already stretched school staff.
2. **Underperforming Schools:** Many districts may be falling short of the requirements of their state's accountability provisions and may be able to use Title 1 or other funds to get their students up to grade level. These schools and districts will often be receptive to hiring expert tutoring companies with a proven track record in raising student achievement.

3. **Outside agency specialty offerings:** Other districts may want help with programs with which they are understaffed or that they currently do not offer. For example, we have landed large contracts with districts who wanted blended learning intervention programs. In addition, some districts allow vendors to apply to become providers of enrichment programs or clubs on school campuses during the after-school hours. Many of these programs are paid for by parents, but are hosted on the school campus. Examples might include chess lessons, robotics, martial arts, and foreign languages.

Our company was awarded contracts ranging from daytime test prep, after-school reading intervention, daytime blended learning programs, daytime and after-school math intervention, after-school project-based learning, summer school programs, and English Language Learner literacy programs. Large-scale programs provided services to over 1,000 students within a single district and smaller scale programs provided services to around 80 students in a single school.

While some of our contracts were awarded under federal SES program mandates, others were opt-in programs paid for by state funds, others were grant funded, others were funded by discretionary Title 1 funding, and still others were funded by private donations. We always gave fair pricing for these contracts, and worked extremely hard to get great results.

How to Find School and District Tutoring Opportunities

There are several effective strategies to staying on top of current opportunities. It is important that you stay on top of ways in which your target districts communicate their Bid opportunities. Many of them will have Board of Directors mandated RFP processes. Others will just compile a list of preferred vendors and reach out to a select few when they are ready to hire a contractor. It is important that you discover how districts that are in your geographical location publicize tutoring, test prep, or professional development opportunities.

RFP Services: We have subscribed to commercial RFP aggregators. One of our favorites was [FindRFP](#). While we found that they were sometimes there was a lag of a few days between RFP announcements, the service was fairly reliable. As of 10/15/2014, regional plans cost \$19.95 a month, national plans cost \$29.95 a month, and there were discounts for annual plans (\$199.50 for Regional and \$299.50 for national).

State Procurement Websites

Participation in State Procurement websites are generally free, and just require registration. In our home state, there are two major databases and we kept our profiles updated and kept our service/commodity codes as broad as possible. Tutoring is often not listed as a category, but Educational Services, Other Services, Professional Services, and other terms were often used as the category by districts.

District Approved Vendor Lists

Many districts have their own RFP processes (some more formal, some less formal). Often it is wise to peruse district websites to search for RFP opportunities. Other times, it is a good idea to contact Title 1 offices or After-School Enrichment departments to investigate how you might become an approved vendor for the district.

Direct Sales

Selling tutoring programs through cold calls to district superintendents, federal programs directors, and school principals is not easy, and often times administrative gatekeepers will prevent the call from ever reaching its target. If you can obtain email addresses through district websites, send color PDF brochures with a compelling value proposition, and then follow up with a call, you might get lucky. In dealing with large public school districts, it is advisable to start with the federal programs or Title 1 Directors and see if you can arrange a quick face to face meeting to discuss your offerings.

Other school positions that are often “influencers” in outsourcing decisions include district level Math or ELA Coordinators, district Special Education Coordinators, Student Services Directors, Directors of Curriculum and Instruction, and Special Programs Directors. District spending decisions are often made months and months in advance, and the sales cycle is often very long. As Gee Kin Chou, former CTO of Oakland Unified states in an [insightful EdSurge blog article](#) on selling edtech: “Be aware of the school budgeting and spending calendar. Once budgets have been approved, usually by March of the prior year, it is difficult to find “new” money to buy anything that has not already been budgeted”. The key is to build relationships, and be top of mind for a phone call when outsourcing decisions are made in the boardroom. As we discuss below, there may also be seasonal or rolling vendor application periods for after school or enrichment programs that are generally paid for by parents. You can learn about these opportunities by calling a district or school administrative office and ask to speak with the department that handles after-school academic and enrichment programs.

Inbound Marketing

Creative companies may be able to position themselves as thought leaders and attract the attention of school and district decision-makers through value-added content - e-guides, white-papers, webinars, and blog articles. The idea here is that one of your sales targets might take your call, respond to an email, or reach out to your company when a new opportunity arises. There are many ways for your company to initiate email campaigns and track effectiveness. (We'll plug ourselves a bit here - we used [Tutorware](#)).

Responding to Requests for Proposal (RFPs)

Many schools and district board of directors have a required Request for Proposal (RFP) process, and applicants are judged and awarded points for desired criteria such as track record, staff qualifications, pricing, and more. These entities often have strict accountability provisions, and will often look for defensible choices when selecting an outside educational services.

Many vendors choose to outsource RFP and grant writing to seasoned consultants and professionals. This can be expensive for large scale RFPs, but can be worth it for ultra-competitive RFP processes with rigorous compliance requirements. We have written many ourselves and outsourced several times as well. Towards the end, we had accumulated such a library of RFP applications that we were able to piece together information and prepare some successful RFPs on our own. For the purposes of this guide, we will make the assumption that you will be applying yourselves. Let's look at a few areas that you may need to address in many Request for Proposals (RFPs) or vendor applications:

Evidence of Effectiveness

Schools and districts will want evidence of effectiveness from any outside educational services provider with which they contract. Before you even begin marketing your services to them, it is essential that you assemble any and all measurable data that demonstrates the effectiveness of your program. If you don't have effectiveness data, it will be difficult and almost impossible for you to land these contracts, so if you are a new agency it is essential that you begin tracking data from day one.

Tracking pre and post test results from similar programs, state exit exam results, test prep results, or any other type of measurable growth metric can satisfy accountability provisions. If you are leading private enrichment programs like chess, robotics, or martial arts, it is essential that you assemble customer reviews and if possible statistics on customer satisfaction. You can easily create online customer surveys using surveymonkey or other survey providers to help you facilitate this. For customer satisfaction metrics, you might consider surveying what percentage of customers would rate your service as Excellent or Good. Another idea is to find out what percentage would recommend your service to friends and family.

To make the strongest case for your effectiveness, we recommend that you assemble charts and graphs by grade level and subject where appropriate. Here is a partial table for reference:

Grade Level	Subject	Number of Students	Year Tested	Pre-Test Results	Post-Test Results	Difference and/or Significant Difference	Name of Assessment Publisher
K	Math	58	08-09	47.1%	76.8%	29.7%	Harcourt Stanford Diagnostic 4 th Edition
K	ELA	114	08-09	64%	81.2%	17.2%	Harcourt Stanford Diagnostic 4 th Edition
1	Math	78	08-09	60.9%	82.7%	21.8%	Harcourt Stanford Diagnostic 4 th Edition
1	ELA	145	08-09	59.4%	73%	13.6%	Harcourt Stanford Diagnostic 4 th Edition
2	Math	98	08-09	65.2%	84%	18.8%	Harcourt Stanford Diagnostic 4 th Edition
2	ELA	189	08-09	60.7%	81%	20.3%	Harcourt Stanford Diagnostic 4 th Edition

To apply for the most competitive RFPs you may also want to consider hiring an outside consultant to compile an effectiveness study using regression analysis. The cost for a project like this can range from a few hundred to several thousand dollars depending upon complexity.

Pricing

Pricing is often one of the most important factors in district and school vendor selection, and especially in this era of budget cuts it can be the most important consideration. Unless the RFP specifically requests pricing earlier in the RFP, we advise that you include this at the end of any RFP. It is important that you establish pricing that will work for your business. Pricing strategies that we've seen accepted have been 1. Tutor Hourly Pricing 2. Per Student pricing 3. One-on-One / Small Group pricing. Often times schools and districts will have a set budget for the program that cannot be exceeded.

High Quality Assessment Tools

Supplemental Educational Services RFPs in the remaining States that offer it (California, Montana, Oklahoma, will generally ask about your assessment tools (pre-tests, post-tests, and formative assessments). Other RFPs may not, but it is still a good idea to include the research basis for your assessment instruments in any school or district RFP even if they do not ask for it. State boards of education, schools and districts will be most interested in assessment tools that have a research basis.

Most research-based assessment publishers will be able to provide you with documentation to strengthen your RFP that will include information to establish the statistical reliability and validity of the test. This supporting evidence will include sampling procedures and demographic characteristics in their standardization processes. For test recommendations, please feel free to contact us at hello@tutorware.com.

Instructional Strategies

In most cases, the panel that will review contractor bids will have PhDs or advanced degrees in education, and will be well-versed in educational best practices. It is important that you speak their language. Assuming that your tutoring agency utilizes tutoring best practices, you should describe in detail your instructional strategies and relay them to student outcomes. An example of one way in which you might relay tutoring best practices in narrative form:

*“Our agency’s instruction is influenced by **Constructivist teaching techniques**, which build on a student’s prior knowledge, called a ‘schema.’ Constructivist techniques emphasize active student participation in learning; the student engages in the process of applying prior knowledge in order to master the task at hand. The instructor asks questions and involves the group in discussing and thinking about the process of problem-solving and learning. Constructivist methods have been proven to effectively increase achievement on standardized tests. Our tutoring instruction is designed to provide sufficient **time-on-task** to support student achievement, which is shown to improve reading skills and leads to meaningful engagement in the classroom, especially for students with the dual risks of reading difficulties and behavior problems. Our tutors also utilize **direct instruction** in our ELA program, because research shows that students are more likely to learn essential ELA skills and strategies if the direct or explicit model of instruction is part of the tutor’s repertoire of teaching methods. Our tutors use **scaffolding** to ensure the objective is made clear and students are given step-by-step directions to follow in order to achieve the objective. Students are provided with a gradually decreasing level of support until they can apply the new skill independently. ”*

Qualifications of Staff

Many RFPs will ask for a organization chart in which you would list the names, titles, and responsibilities of your senior team, as well as many operations or administrative staff that would play a role in the school or district program. Many RFPs place a strong emphasis on your tutoring faculty and will request a sample of available tutors, degrees, and years of experience. Assemble a strong team of certified teachers or at a bare minimum tutors with advanced degrees and a proven track record. Many school contracts will favor the use of Highly Qualified (HQ) teachers..

Program Alignment with Common Core or State Standards

District RFPs will almost always ask for you to describe how your program aligns with Common Core, State, or district priority standards. Make sure that you clearly demonstrate how your curricula aligns with their priorities, and create a chart that demonstrates this. A reduced-size sample chart might look like this:

3 rd Grade Math			
Arizona Academic Content Standard	Common Core State Standards	<i>Odyssey Math</i> Learning Activities	<i>Odyssey Math</i> Lesson Quizzes
3.OA.3. Use multiplication and division within 100 to solve word problems in situations involving equal groups, arrays, and measurement quantities, e.g., by using drawings and equations with a symbol for the unknown number to represent the problem.	3.RI.7, ET03-S1C1-01	20242, 20243, 3B013, 3B014, 34185, 34186, 3B016, 3B017, 34198, 34199	MA02AC03, MA02AC04, MA03AB01, MA03AB02

Evaluation and Monitoring

Schools and districts will often ask for your processes and procedures in monitoring your academic programs once they have begun. They will often expect a detailed description of your team's onsite monitoring, evaluation criteria, formative assessment processes, attendance tracking, and more.

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District or School Letters of Recommendation

Letters of recommendation from district or school staff from similar assignments are ideal for most RFPs. Letters of recommendations from satisfied parents are commonly requested as well. Many district staff will be prohibited from providing references, but it is still a good idea to ask. We highly recommend that you make it a priority to constantly update letters of recommendation each school year, as it will look suspect if you use recommendation letters from years past and don't include recent ones.

Background Checking Policies

Student safety is of the utmost importance to all school and district clients and all of them will require Department of Public Safety (DPS), Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), or other background screening through Livescan. Depending on the state and district policies where you work, you should become aware of processing wait times to receive clearance. In some states that still require educators to possess a physical copy of a Department of Public Safety Fingerprint Clearance card the processing times can sometimes be over 2 months.

Other Considerations

If proof of insurance is requested, make sure that you read district insurance requirements very carefully and if needed consult with your broker. Make sure that you have ample professional liability insurance, and be prepared to provide an insurance certificate with the school or district listed as a certificate holder.

Setting up Private Pay Programs on School Campuses

Many schools districts have seasonal or rolling application processes through which vendors may apply to become approved academic tutoring or enrichment program providers on school campuses. Tutoring providers will generally need to keep careful watch on districts and schools that have an annual application period. Tutoring providers may apply at any time to schools and districts with a rolling admission process.

You may find a variety of different after-school arrangements depending upon the district. Some districts and schools will pay the entire cost of the vendor program (usually tutoring, test prep, parent involvement workshops) . In other cases, the parent is expected to pay the tab and the school or district generally functions as as a program review board that ensures that the quality of vendor programs is high and that parents give good ratings. Often times, the school or district will charge facility rental fees to outside vendors, so it is important to be aware of these costs when preparing your program fees.

Parent-funded enrichment programs are most likely found in more affluent areas, whereas district funded tutoring programs are more likely found in districts with large percentages of Title 1 students.

Prepare for meetings and presentations

Many schools and districts will request a face-to-face meeting either before the RFP release or after all RFPs have been evaluated and they are selecting between a few of the top applicants. For these meetings, it is advisable to come prepared with 2-3 copies of a short presentation. We would usually print the pages on a color printer and get it bound at a local print shop. You'll want to include charts and graphs of your program's effectiveness, an org chart, and a quick synopsis of program details. If invited to a face to face meeting, you might consider asking the school or district staff if they would like you to prepare a PowerPoint presentation to go over key features of your program.



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