Freight RFP template for shippers

A working RFP document: 8 sections, 12 bidder questions, and a weighted scoring rubric. Fill in your data, send it to 5 to 8 bidders, and score the responses on total landed cost, capability, and risk.

How to use this template

- **Fill sections 1 through 8** with your data. Every blank you leave gets filled in by bidder assumptions that favor the bidder.
- **Send the 12 questions to every bidder** and compare answers side by side. They surface the structural differences that pricing and brochures hide.
- **Score with the rubric on the last page.** Total landed cost 40 to 50%, capability 30 to 40%, risk 15 to 25%. Lowest base rate wins less than half the time once cost is normalized.

The 30 to 45 day RFP cycle

Publish these dates in the RFP itself. The two longest phases are bidder Q&A (5 to 7 days) and bid preparation (14 to 21 days). Most timelines underestimate both.

PHASE	TYPICAL DURATION	YOUR DATE
1. Bid release	Day 0	
2. Bidder Q&A window	5 to 7 days	
3. Q&A answers published to all bidders	1 to 2 days	
4. Bid preparation	14 to 21 days	
5. Bid submission deadline	1 day	
6. Scorecard review	5 to 7 days	
7. Finalist interviews (optional)	3 to 5 days	
8. Award notification	1 day	

Rule of thumb: run an RFP when annual freight spend tops $1 to 2M, performance is missing SLA, the network is changing, or contracts hit a 24 to 36 month benchmark cycle. Below $1M, spot quoting beats RFP overhead.

Section 1. Company background and freight profile

Give bidders enough context to bid accurately: who you are, what you ship, and what the freight has to do.

FIELD	YOUR ANSWER
Company and industry	
Annual freight spend	
Ship-from locations (plants, DCs, 3PLs)	
Ship-to profile (retail DCs, stores, residential, B2B)	
Product profile (commodity, packaging, freight class if known)	
Peak months and seasonality	
Retail compliance requirements (Walmart, Target, Costco MABD / OTIF)	

Section 2. Lane and volume profile

Attach 12 months of shipment history at shipment-level granularity. Anonymize if needed but do not summarize: bidders need real data to bid real numbers. This table is the roll-up.

ORIGIN	DESTINATION	MODE	SHIPMENTS / MONTH	AVG PALLETS	AVG WEIGHT (LBS)	CURRENT RATE

Add rows or attach the full lane file. Include transit time, OTD, damage rate, and accessorial spend per lane if you have them.

Section 3. Mode requirements

Mark every mode in scope. Multi-mode bidders should show how they decide mode per shipment, not just list capabilities.

☐	LTL	Lane list or % of volume:
☐	Partial truckload (PTL)	Lane list or % of volume:
☐	Full truckload (FTL)	Lane list or % of volume:
☐	Box truck	Lane list or % of volume:
☐	Cargo van / final mile	Lane list or % of volume:
☐	Cross-dock / pool distribution	Facilities or regions:
☐	Other (temperature control, liftgate density, trade shows)	Describe:

Section 4. SLA and scorecard targets

SLAs without consequences are aspirations. State the target, how it is measured, and what happens when it is missed.

METRIC	YOUR TARGET	MEASUREMENT METHOD AND CREDIT / PENALTY
On-time pickup		
On-time delivery (OTD)		
Damage rate		
Claim resolution time		
Billing accuracy (invoice = quote)		
Tracking / visibility compliance		

Common starting points: OTD 98%+, damage under 0.5%, claims resolved under 30 days, billing accuracy 99%+.

Section 5. Pricing structure required

Dictate the pricing structure so bids are comparable. Reject formats with floating fuel surcharges or open-ended accessorial schedules: they hide 20 to 40% of true cost.

MODE	STRUCTURE YOU REQUIRE
LTL	Per pallet, all-inclusive (base + fuel + standard accessorials in one number)
PTL	Per linear foot
FTL	Per load, with detention and layover terms stated explicitly
Box truck / cargo van	Per load
Fuel	State the policy: included, or indexed to what, capped at what

Section 6. Accessorial policy

The surcharge stack is where quoted rates and invoices diverge. Require a fixed schedule with caps, and a documented dispute window.

ACCESSORIAL	INCLUDED / CAPPED / EXCLUDED	CAP OR RATE
Liftgate (pickup / delivery)		
Residential delivery		
Inside delivery		
Detention / layover		
Reweigh / reclassification		
Redelivery / storage		

Trap to avoid: awarding on lowest base rate without normalizing accessorials. A $2.10 base bid often invoices higher than a $2.30 all-inclusive bid once fuel, reclass, liftgate, and reweigh land. Score total landed cost only.

Section 7. Technology and integration requirements

In 2026 these are baseline, not differentiators. Bidders without an integration story add 6 to 12 weeks to implementation.

REQUIREMENT	REQUIRED?	NOTES / TRANSACTIONS
Real-time tracking (GPS + scan events)		
EDI (list transactions: 856, 940, 945, 753, 754, 210)		
REST API for quote / book / track		
Webhooks / event notifications		
TMS or portal access for your team		
Reporting cadence (per shipment SLA reporting)		

Section 8. Contract terms

TERM	YOUR REQUIREMENT
Contract length (12 / 24 / 36 months)	
Volume commitment (if any) and flex band	
Rate review cadence	
Award structure (single award / multi-award primary + backup)	
Termination terms and cure period	
Insurance and liability requirements	

Award structure: single award prices better through volume commitment; multi-award (primary plus backup per lane) lowers risk and keeps competitive pressure on performance. Most shippers above $5M spend run multi-award.

Implementation milestones belong in the contract: signature, integration testing, pilot lanes live week 1 to 2, full cutover week 4 to 6, 90 day performance review. Most failed RFPs fail in implementation, not in the bid.

The 12 bidder questions that predict performance

Send to every bidder. Compare answers side by side. Vague answers are answers.

1. What is your network model: asset only, broker, or hybrid?

Determines who actually touches the freight and how many hands are between you and the truck.

2. What is your capacity guarantee mechanism at peak?

Anyone can cover freight in a soft market. Ask what is contractually committed in week 47.

3. What is your technology stack and API capability?

Ask for the API docs URL, not a slide about innovation.

4. Which EDI transactions and integrations do you support today?

"On the roadmap" means 6 to 12 weeks of your implementation timeline.

5. What is your claim resolution process and average days to close?

Ask for the actual average, then verify it with references.

6. What is the escalation path when a shipment goes sideways?

Named humans with response time commitments, or a ticket queue.

7. How do you measure on-time delivery, and against what timestamp?

Appointment time, gate time, or POD scan changes the number by several points.

8. What is your full accessorial schedule with rates?

Open-ended schedules are the largest source of quote-to-invoice variance.

9. How is your fuel surcharge calculated, and can it be included in the rate?

DOE indexed fuel adds 12 to 18%; carrier tables add 18 to 25%; all-inclusive adds zero.

10. What billing accuracy do you guarantee, and what is the remedy for misses?

Invoice equals quote should be a contract term, not a hope.

11. What is your invoice dispute window and process?

A 7 day dispute window with a documented process beats a 90 day maybe.

12. Three references at our volume tier and lane mix.

Call all three. Then ask each reference for two more shippers using the same provider, and call those.

Weighted bid scoring rubric

Score every bid 1 to 10 on each axis, multiply by the weight, and total. Lowest base bid wins less than half the time once cost is normalized to total landed and the other two axes are scored.

AXIS	WEIGHT	BIDDER A	BIDDER B	BIDDER C	BIDDER D	BIDDER E
Total landed cost base + fuel + accessorials + reclass exposure	40 to 50%					
Service capability technology, visibility, claim handling, integration	30 to 40%					
Risk profile carrier mix, capacity guarantee, financial stability	15 to 25%					
Weighted total						

Bidder mix worksheet

5 to 8 bidders is the sweet spot: 2 to 3 incumbents for benchmarking plus 3 to 5 new bidders for competitive pressure. Mix asset carriers, brokers, and networks: they deliver structurally different results against the same RFP.

BIDDER	CATEGORY (ASSET / BROKER / NETWORK)	INCUMBENT?

Want Warp on the bidder list? Warp responds to LTL, PTL, FTL, box truck, and cargo van RFPs with per pallet all-inclusive pricing, live GPS plus scan events, and EDI 856 / 940 / 945 / 753 / 754. Share your scope at wearewarp.com/book-a-meeting and Warp returns a structured response inside your published window.