

MEMORANDUM

FROM: Commissioner Nathan Houdek (WI), Chair of the Financial Condition (E) Committee

TO: Interested Regulators & Interested Parties of the Financial Condition (E) Committee

DATE: August 2, 2024

RE: Request for Comments on the Draft Request for Proposal

At the 2023 Summer National Meeting, the Financial Condition (E) Committee exposed its *Framework for Regulation of Insurer Investments – A Holistic Review* document. Included in that framework is the recommendation that the NAIC engage a consultant to design and help implement a new process under which the NAIC develops a strong due diligence program over the ongoing use of credit rating providers (CRPs). At the 2024 Spring National Meeting, the Executive (EX) Committee approved the Committee to engage in the development of a request for proposal (RFP).

The Committee, with the assistance of state insurance regulators from the Valuation of Securities (E) Task Force, and its Investment Framework Drafting Group, both chaired by Carrie Mears (IA), have developed a first draft of such an RFP. Such an initial draft was necessary to facilitate further discussion and development of a final RFP, but at this time, the Committee would like to engage all interested parties on this RFP. To that end, the Committee intends this to be a fully transparent and constructive process. The RFP document proposed to be exposed is a draft document. This is not a release of the RFP for bid nor a solicitation of RFP responses.

We recognize there is not an "out of box" product to be delivered in response to this RFP. We anticipate that our selection of a consultant will be predicated upon experience in providing solutions for similar quantitative and qualitative issues rather than providing the solution in response to the RFP. Therefore, the RFP is drafted as such to welcome proposals from many parties.

We acknowledge this RFP could be improved to ensure the best possible response outcome. As a result, we are exposing this draft RFP for 60 days to obtain feedback on the following:

CRP Due Diligence and Objectives

- (1) Are all objectives clear and understood? Do any need to be refined?
- (2) Are there additional objectives we should consider that are not included here?
- (3) Are there objectives that interested parties feel should be excluded, and why?

RFP Response Requirements

- (1) Are all requirements clear and understood? Do any need to be refined?
- (2) What additional response requirements could be included to ensure the best receipt of material for selection purposes?
- (3) Are there response requirements that interested parties feel should be excluded, and why?

Selection Process and Assessment Criteria

(1) Is the selection process clear and understood?

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Other

(1) Any other feedback that would aid in improving the RFP.

Please direct comments to Dan Daveline (ddaveline@naic.org) by 10/14/2024. Comments are welcome from all interested parties, including industry, CRPs, and potential respondents to the RFP.



August 2, 2024

RFP #XXXX | Credit Rating Provider Due Diligence

In 2023, the National Association of Insurance Commissioners' (NAIC) Financial Condition (E) Committee introduced a Framework for Regulation of Insurer Investments – A Holistic Review that was revised and exposed for comment at the 2024 Spring National Meeting. The Executive Summary of the framework is as follows:

- Recent initiatives to address gaps in the regulatory framework for insurer investments have received much attention by a variety of stakeholders.
- While the broader commentary has included many misconceptions around these initiatives, it has
 also included constructive feedback with themes and observations that many regulators have
 shared.
- At the most basic level, the question has arisen what is the most effective use of regulatory resources in the modern environment of insurance regulation for investments?
- The historical focus of the Securities Valuation Office (SVO) has been on risk assessment of individual securities, with filing exempt securities (FE) blindly reliant on credit rating providers (CRPs) for designations.
- The SVO currently lacks the tools to provide due diligence and assessment over the use and effectiveness of CRPs, or to conduct enterprise- or industry-wide risk analytics.
- Rather than a framework that utilizes valuable SVO resources to prioritize synthesizing CRP functions, a more effective use of those resources would be to prioritize the establishment of a robust and effective governance structure for the due diligence of CRPs.
- Further, with investment in modern risk analytics tools, the SVO could provide invaluable risk
 analysis capabilities to better support the risk-focused approach to supervision, at both a microand macro-prudential level.
- The framework provides concrete proposals envisioning a modernization of the role and capabilities of the SVO in a way that correlates with the observed shift towards more complex and asset-intensive insurer business strategies.
- The framework also provides high-level guidelines for considering consistency of capital across assets as the investment RBC initiatives move forward, recognizing the practical limitations of absolute capital parity.

Currently, risk-based capital charges that support the capital framework to identify weakly capitalized insurers, rely upon NAIC Designations as the measure of investment risk, for assets reported as bonds, as well as limited risk assessment for non-bond holdings. NAIC Designations are either provided directly by the SVO for filed securities or, for the majority of insurer investments, by a direct translation of a credit rating from a CRP for those securities that are exempt from

filing (FE). There are currently no criteria for becoming a CRP beyond being an U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) registered NRSRO and under its regulatory authority, the SEC is unable to opine on the quality of NRSRO methodologies and ratings. As such, the NAIC "blindly" relies on the CRP ratings. There is no mechanism for overall due diligence around CRP usage, no process to assess the reasonability of a CRP's ratings, nor an ability to challenge an individual rating for not conforming to regulator expectations of how it was determined. Based on this Framework, the NAIC is planning several workstreams to address the issues identified. Specific to this Request for Proposal (RFP), the NAIC is looking for detailed technical recommendations that would aid in its objectives to:

- Reduce/eliminate "blind" reliance on CRP ratings but retain overall utilization of CRPs ratings with
 the implementation of a strong due diligence framework. This framework should be extremely
 robust with focused resources within the NAIC in its implementation and maintenance.
- At the conclusion of this the project that will result from this RFP there should be a quantitative
 and qualitative due diligence analytical framework design and implementation plan that will
 permit the SVO to primarily focus on the on-going administration of this holistic due diligence
 process around CRP usage. That process must be vigorous and consequential (e.g. clear
 quantitative and qualitative parameters for CRPs utilized to provide ratings for use in assigning
 NAIC designations).

At this time, the NAIC is soliciting proposals from qualified third-party firms for the development of a "Credit Rating Provider (CRP) Due Diligence Framework", and detailed quantitative and qualitative analysis that supports the full development and implementation of the framework that can be repeated periodically by regulators and staff.

A clarification and question and answer session will be held at **TBD pm Central Time, Month Day, Year.** Firms interested in submitting a proposal are encouraged to attend this WebEx session. Please click (link) to register.

Firms intending to respond to this RFP are asked to submit an email indicating their intent to bid and Point of Contact details by **5pm Central Time**, **Day**, **Month**, **Year**, via email to Jim Woody at Proposals@naic.org.

To receive consideration, final proposals must be sent electronically to Proposals@naic.org no later than **5pm Central Time**, **Day**, **Month**, **Year**.

Proposals must address each item described within the RFP Response Requirements: 1| Respondent Company Overview, 2|Detailed RFP Response / Proposal, 3| Additional Required Documentation, and 4| Additional Instructions.

RFP | Schedule

1
 RFP released
Clarification & Q&A Session register here
Vendor intent to Bid due to Proposals@naic.org
Vendor RFP questions due to Proposals@naic.org
NAIC responses to vendor questions
Vendor submissions due by 5pm CT to Proposals@naic.org
Vendor Interviews, if needed
Projected Vendor Selection and RFP Award*
Projected Project Start

^{*} NAIC's Executive Committee has the final authority to direct contract execution for the selected vendor.

Selection Criteria

The RFP Selection Committee will base the vendor selection on criteria including:

- Completeness and quality of the proposal
- Experience with similar projects and the credit ratings process
- Professional reputation of the firm and qualifications of individuals assigned to this project
- Proposed project timeline and cost
- Analytical alignment of the proposed framework to the NAIC's financial solvency objectives.

The NAIC reserves the right to reject any or all proposals, request new proposals or request additional information. The NAIC reserves the right to further negotiate with any or all bidders.

Questions

Proposal-related questions should be submitted to Proposals@naic.org by **5pm Central Time, Day, Month XX, Year**. Answers to each question submitted will be posted on the NAIC RFP website by **Day, Month, Year**.

Questions related to any other matter should be directed to NAIC Chief Financial Officer Jim Woody at JWoody@naic.org, who is the NAIC point-of-contact for this RFP.

Respectfully,

James Woody, Chief Financial Officer, National Association of Insurance Commissioners



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF INSURANCE COMMISSIONERS (NAIC)

Request for Proposal-#(number)

Credit Rating Provider Due Diligence Framework

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Background Information

About the NAIC

The National Association of Insurance Commissioners (NAIC) is a 501(c) (3) not-for-profit organization.

The NAIC is the U.S. standard-setting and regulatory support organization created and governed by the chief insurance regulators from the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and five U.S. territories.

Through the NAIC, state insurance regulators establish standards and best practices, conduct peer review, and coordinate their regulatory oversight. NAIC staff supports these efforts and represents the collective views of state regulators domestically and internationally. NAIC members, together with the central resources of the NAIC, form the national system of state-based insurance regulation in the U.S.

Role of the VOSTF

The NAIC has determined that assessing the risk of an insurance company's investments is a good starting point for assessing that insurer's financial solvency risk over its investments. CreditInvestment risk is one of the NAICs branded risk classifications monitored by state solvency regulators and which includes considering the credit quality for bond type securities. The Valuation of Securities (E) Task Force (VOSTF) formulates the NAIC's policies for securities that can be assigned the NAIC's measure of investment risk, an NAIC Designations. The Task Force's polices are documented and published in the Purposes and Procedures Manual of the NAIC Investment Analysis Office (P&P Manual). The NAIC has assigned the Securities Valuation Office (SVO) and Structured Securities Group (SSG) the responsibility of carrying out the policies of the VOS/TF and assigned the Task Force with the responsibility to oversee of the operations of these NAIC departments. The SVO and SSG, when referred to jointly, are called the Investment Analysis Office (IAO).

SVO and SSG

The SVO and SSG are staffed by investment professionals whose careers have been dedicated to investment analysis. The analysis staff in these departments typically have over 25-years of investment experience, all have a bachelor's degree, 84% have an MBA, roughly a third are chartered financial analysts (CFA) or have some other advanced level certification or degree, and two-thirds have prior work experience at rating agencies.

The SVO conducts credit quality and investment risk assessments of securities owned by state-regulated insurance companies through insurer submissions of investment documents into the NAIC's VISION application and performs other functions such as: the administration of the filing exemption process (the NAIC's automated process for translating credit rating provider ratings into an NAIC Designation), compilation and publication of the SVO List of Investment Securities (a data set of all NAIC Designations published in the NAIC's AVS+ application), list of credit ratings eligible for translation, the list of funds eligible to receive NAIC Designations, the list of qualified

U.S. financial institutions that can issue letters of credit for reinsurance purposes, assessment of derivative counterparties, the list of sovereign NAIC Designation equivalents, and any other process mandated in the P&P Manual.

The SSG assesses the credit quality and investment risks in securitizations and other complex financially engineered securities through the utilization and oversight of external financial modeling vendors. Typically, these are residential mortgage-backed securities (RMBS), commercial mortgage-backed securities (CMBS), mortgage reference securities and, beginning in 2025, collateralized loan obligations (CLOs).

NAIC | Mission Statement

The mission of the NAIC is to assist the state insurance regulators, individually and collectively, in serving the public interest and achieving the following fundamental insurance regulatory goals in a responsive, efficient, and cost-effective manner, consistent with the wishes of its members:

- Protect the public interest;
- Promote competitive markets;
- Facilitate the fair and equitable treatment of insurance consumers;
- Promote the reliability, solvency, and financial solidity of insurance institutions; and
- Support and improve state regulation of insurance.

Current CRP Review Criteria and Crediting Rating Use

The Use of Credit Ratings of NRSROS in NAIC Processes

Providing Credit Rating Services to the NAIC

The NAIC uses credit ratings for a number of regulatory purposes, including, to administer the filing exempt rule. Any rating organization that has been designated a Nationally Recognized Statistical Rating Organization (NRSRO) by the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and which continues to be subject to federal regulation, may apply to provide Credit Rating Services to the NAIC for the classes of credit ratings for which it is registered as an NRSRO.

Policy and Legal Disclosure Pertaining to the NAIC Credit Rating Provider (CRP) List

The NAIC uses publicly available credit ratings, when available, as one component of the services it provides to state insurance regulators concerned with financial solvency monitoring of insurance company investments.

The NAIC acts solely as a private consumer of credit ratings. The sole NAIC objective in obtaining and using credit ratings is to conserve limited regulatory resources; e.g., the resources of the SVO. The VOS/TF has established the procedure specified in this section solely to ensure that the NAIC can avail itself of credit rating opinions.

The NAIC does not select, approve or certify NRSROs or other rating organizations or distinguish among them for any public or policy purpose whatsoever. Nor does the NAIC endorse the credit rating or analytical product of any CRP or rating organization or distinguish between CRPs or rating organizations for any specific public purpose. The NAIC disclaims any authority to regulate CRPs or rating organizations.

NAIC Designations

NAIC Designations are proprietary symbols of the NAIC. The SVO, the SSG and, under certain circumstances, insurers, produce NAIC Designations for insurer-owned securities using the policies, procedures or methodologies adopted by the VOSTF in the P&P Manual. NAIC Designations are produced for statutory accounting, reporting, state investment laws and other purposes identified in the NAIC Financial Regulation Standards and Accreditation Program and/or other NAIC developed regulatory guidance embodied in state law. They must be considered in the context of their appropriateness and consistency of use in the NAIC Policy Statement and Financial Regulation Standards (SFRS) and other NAIC guidance.

NAIC Designations represent opinions of gradations of the likelihood of an insurer's timely receipt of an investment's full principal and expected interest ("investment risk"). Where appropriate for a given investment, NAIC Designations and Designation Categories shall reflect "tail risk" and/or loss given default, the position of the specific liability in the issuer's capital structure, and all other risks, except for volatility/interest rate, prepayment, extension or liquidity risk. NAIC Designations shall be identified by the NAIC 1 through NAIC 6 symbols (as

modified by NAIC Designation Categories) which indicate the highest quality (least risk) to the lowest quality (greatest risk), respectively.

Investment risk is the likelihood that an insurer will <u>receive</u> full and timely principal and expected interest. It differs from "credit risk" which focuses on the ability of an issuer to <u>make payments</u> in accordance with contractual terms. Credit risk is, at times, too narrow a concept for NAIC purposes. For example, the performance component of a principal protected security (PPS) may produce no return and, therefore, the PPS could pay no interest with no event of default by the issuer. As such, focusing solely on credit risk could limit the SVO's ability to assess the risk of the performance component of a principal protected security or on potential risks posed by other investment types.

NAIC Designation Category – Means and refers to 20 more granular delineations of investment risk in the NAIC 1 through NAIC 6 investment risk scale used by the VOS/TF to relate investment risk in insurer-owned securities to a risk-based capital factor assigned by the NAIC Capital Adequacy (E) Task Force. Each delineation of investment risk is represented by a letter (a Modifier) which modifies the NAIC Designation grade to indicate a more granular measure of investment risk within the NAIC Designation grade. The more granular delineations of investment risk are distributed as follows: 7 for the NAIC 1 Designation grade indicated by the letters A through G; 3 delineations each for each of the NAIC Designation grades NAIC 2, NAIC 3, NAIC 4 and NAIC 5 indicated by the letters A, B and C and 1 delineation for NAIC Designation grade NAIC 6. The NAIC Designation Category framework is shown in the P&P Manual. All Modifiers roll up into the respective NAIC Designation grade as they are a subset of them.

NAIC Designation	NAIC Designation + Modifier =	NAIC Designation Category
1	A	1.A
1	В	1.B
1	C	1.C
1	D	1.D
1	Е	1.E
1	F	1.F
1	G	1.G
2	A	2.A
2	В	2.B
2	C	2.C
3	A	3.A
3	В	3.B
3	С	3.C
4	A	4.A
4	В	4.B
4	С	4.C
5	A	5.A
5	В	5.B
5	C	5.C
6		6

An objective of the VOS/TF is to support regulators in the assessment of the financial ability of an insurer to maintain financial solvency, through the making of policy concerning insurer investment risk and the identification and sharing of pertinent information with other relevant regulators and regulatory groups responsible for the NAIC's regulatory framework.

NAIC Policy on the use of Credit Ratings of NRSROS

Procedure to Become an NAIC Credit Rating Provider

An NRSRO that wishes to provide Credit Rating Services to the NAIC may indicate its interest by sending a letter to the Chair of the VOS/TF with a copy to the Director of the SVO, in which it:

- Indicates an interest in providing Credit Rating Services to the NAIC.
- Confirms that it is currently an NRSRO subject to regulation by the SEC.
- Provides a chart relating its credit rating symbols to NAIC Designations.
- Indicates that the NRSRO agrees to enter into a legally binding agreement under which the NRSRO will:
 - Provide Credit Rating Services to the NAIC at no cost;
 - Reimburse the NAIC for all costs associated with: integration of its data feed into NAIC systems, subsequent changes to NAIC systems to accommodate changes in the NRSRO's systems and changes to NAIC systems as a result of the termination of Credit Rating Services by the NRSRO;
 - o Give written notice 6 months prior to terminating Credit Rating Services; and
 - Agree not to claim in marketing literature that the provision of Credit Rating Services indicates NAIC approval or endorsement of the NRSRO, its products or services.

When directed to do so by the VOS/TF, the SVO shall add the name of the NRSRO (thereafter described as a Credit Rating Provider (CRP)) to the NAIC Credit Rating Provider List in the publication of the P&P Manual that follows the execution of an agreement between the NAIC and the NRSRO.

Regulatory Significance – Filing Exempt Rule

Adding the name of an NRSRO to the Credit Rating Provider List indicates that insurance companies must use the credit ratings assigned by that NRSRO, if any, when determining the NAIC Designation equivalent for a security to be reported under the filing exempt rule. Only those NAIC CRP ratings that meet the definition below may be translated into NAIC Designations under the filing exempt rule. Securities assigned ratings by NAIC CRPs that do not meet the definition below, shall be filed with the SVO. The translation of a NAIC CRP rating into an NAIC Designation is conducted in accordance with the procedures described in the P&P Manual.

Definition – Credit Ratings Eligible for Translation to NAIC Designations

As disclosed below, the NAIC may determine that the rated security or investment is of a type that is not eligible to be reported on Schedule D or that the NAIC determines is not appropriate for NRSRO credit ratings to be used to determine the regulatory treatment of a specific asset class, as specified in the P&P Manual.

The credit rating of the CRP to which this section and the NAIC Credit Rating Provider List refers

to is the (a) credit rating assigned by the NAIC CRP; (b) by application of a CRP's proprietary long-term obligation ratings scale and methodology; to (c) securities.

Credit ratings of a NAIC CRP that meet this definition are entitled to a presumption of convertibility to the equivalent NAIC Designation published in the NAIC Credit Rating Provider List except that the presumption of convertibility is subject to the following limitations:

- Those rating activities or markets in which the entity has NAIC CRP status.
- Securities with monitored NAIC CRP ratings that:
 - Are monitored at least annually by the CRP that issued the rating;
 - Are assigned to a specific issue that must be specifically identified;
 - Apply to securities where the issuer promises to repay principal and interest or dividends;
 - Convey an opinion as to the likelihood of payment of both principal and interest/dividends due from the issuer to the holders of the security; or
 - Are structured to pay only principal or only interest/dividends, if the monitored NAIC CRP rating addresses the likelihood of payment of either the principal, in the case of a security structured to pay only principal or the interest/dividends, in the case of security structured to pay only interest/dividends (an "Eligible NAIC CRP Rating").

Special Rating Systems

Unless otherwise specifically approved by the VOS/TF special rating systems of any CRP, rating agency or rating organization shall not be entitled to a presumption of convertibility. Nevertheless, an SVO analyst assessing a security that has been assigned such a rating by any rating organization, including a CRP, may consider the information imparted by that rating or a related research report as one factor in determining an NAIC Designation

List OF NAIC Credit Rating Provider

The CRPs that provide Credit Rating Services to the NAIC are (listed alphabetically):

- A.M. Best Rating Services, Inc. (A.M. Best) For credit ratings issued to insurance companies; corporate issuers and issuers of asset-backed securities.
- DBRS, Inc. (DBRS Morningstar) For credit ratings issued to financial institutions, brokers, or dealers; insurance companies; corporate issuers; issuers of asset-backed securities and issuers of government securities, municipal securities, or securities issued by a foreign government.
- Egan-Jones Ratings Co. For credit ratings issued to financial institutions, brokers, or dealers; insurance companies and corporate issuers.
- Fitch Ratings, Inc. For credit ratings issued to financial institutions, brokers, or dealers; insurance companies; corporate issuers; issuers of asset-backed securities and issuers of government securities, municipal securities, or securities issued by a foreign government.
- HR Ratings de Mexico, S.A. de C.V. For credit ratings issued to financial institutions, brokers, or dealers; corporate issuers and issuers of government securities, municipal securities, or securities issued by a foreign government.

- Kroll Bond Rating Agency, LLC. For credit ratings issued to financial institutions, brokers, or dealers; insurance companies; corporate issuers; issuers of asset-backed securities and issuers of government securities, municipal securities, or securities issued by a foreign government.
- Moody's Investors Service, Inc. for credit ratings issued to financial institutions, brokers, or dealers; insurance companies; corporate issuers; issuers of asset-backed securities and issuers of government securities, municipal securities, or securities issued by a foreign government.
- S&P Global Ratings, for credit ratings issued to financial institutions, brokers, or dealers; insurance companies; corporate issuers; issuers of asset-backed securities and issuers of government securities, municipal securities, or securities issued by a foreign government.

The Credit Rating Providers identified above include those of its affiliates that the credit rating provider identified to the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) as part of its Form NRSRO Application as a separate legal entity or a separately identifiable department or division of the credit rating provider that determines credit ratings that are credit ratings of the credit rating provider and which the SEC treats as a credit rating issued by the credit rating provider for purposes of Section 15E of the Exchange Act and the SEC's rules thereunder. The full list of CRP ratings eligible for translation to an NAIC Designation can be found on the SVO's webpage: NAIC — Credit Ratings Eligible for Translation to NAIC Designations.

CRP Credit Rating Equivalent to NAIC Designations and NAIC Designation Categories (agencies listed in order as they appear in the P&P Manual)

			(Pursi	uant to the guida		particularly, Part C	g Providers (*) One, "The Use of Cre		Os in NAIC Proce	sses,"
			"Filing Exemptions," "Policies Applicable to Specific Asset Classes," and Part Three, "Procedure Applicable to Filing Exempt (FE) Securities and Private Letter (PL) Rating Securities")							
NAIC Designation	NAIC Designation Modifier		Moody's Investors Service, Inc.	S&P Global Ratings	Fitch Ratings,	DBRS, Inc. (DBRS	A.M. Best Rating Services, Inc.	Kroll Bond Rating Agency, LLC	Egan-Jones Ratings Co.	HR Ratings de Mexico, S.A. de C.V.
Designation 1	A A	Category 1.A	Aaa	AAA	AAApre, AAA	Morningstar) AAA, Pfd-1 (high)	aaa	AAA	AAA	HR AAA (G)
1	В	1.B	Aa1	AA+	AA+	AA (high), Pfd-1	aa+	AA+	AA+	HR AA+ (G)
1	c	1.C	Aa2	AA	AA	AA, Pfd-1 (low)	aa	AA	AA	HR AA (G)
1	D	1.D	Aa3	AA-	AA-	AA (low), Pfd-1	aa-	AA-	AA-	HR AA- (G)
1	E	1.E	A1	A+	A+	A (high)	a+	A+	A+	HR A+ (G)
1	F	1.F	A2	A	A	A	a	A	A	HR A (G)
1	G	1.G	A3	A-	A-	A (low)	a-	A-	A-	HR A- (G)
2	A	2.A	Baa1	BBB+	BBB+	BBB (high), Pfd-2 (high)	bbb+	BBB+	BBB+	HR BBB+ (G)
2	В	2.B	Baa2	BBB	BBB	BBB, Pfd-2	bbb	BBB	BBB	HR BBB (G)
2	С	2.C	Baa3	BBB-	BBB-	BBB (low), Pfd-2 (low)	bbb-	BBB-	BBB-	HR BBB- (G)
3	A	3.A	Ba1	BB+	BB+	BB (high), Pfd-3 (high)	bb+	BB+	BB+	HR BB+ (G)
3	В	3.В	Ba2	BB	BB	BB, Pfd-3	bb	BB	BB	HR BB (G)
3	c	3.C	Ba3	BB-	BB-	BB (low), Pfd-3 (low)	bb-	BB-	BB-	HR BB- (G)
4	A	4.A	B1	B+	B+	B (high), Pfd-4 (high)	b+	B+	B+	HR B+ (G)
4	В	4.B	B2	В	В	B, Pfd-4	b	В	В	HR B (G)
4	С	4.C	В3	B-	B-	B (low), Pfd-4 (low)	b-	B-	B-	HR B- (G)
5	A	5. A	Caa1	CCC+	CCC+	CCC (high), Pfd-5 (high)	ccc+	CCC+	CCC+	HR C+ (G)
5	В	5.B	Caa2	ccc	ccc	CCC, Pfd-5	ccc	ccc	CCC	HR C (G)
5	С	5.C	Caa3	CCC-	CCC-	CCC (low), Pfd-5 (low)	ecc-	CCC-	CCC-	HR C- (G)
6		6	Ca	CC	CC	CC (high)	cc	CC	CC	HR D (G)
6		6	С	С	С	CC	c	C	С	
6		6		D	DDD	CC (low)	d	D	D	
6		6			DD	C (high)				
6		6			D	C (low)				
6		6				D (low)				
0		0				D				

Note: * This is a listing of only the "generic" Credit Rating Provider (CRP) rating symbols. CRPs use a variety of symbols; including, combinations of prefixes and suffixes that provide additional information about the rating symbol which are described in the CRP's documentation. There are over 2,000+ unique rating symbols used by CRPs to describe long-term securities. The SVO webpage [https://www.naic.org/swo.htm] maintains a master list of Credit Ratings Eligible for Translation to NAIC Designations. The SVO does not currently translate short-term security ratings as part of its Compilation and Publication of the SVO List of Investment Securities incorporated into the NAIC's AVS+ product.

Credit Rating Provider Due Diligence Objectives

Vision and Objectives

Specific to the project that will result from this Request for Proposal (RFP), the NAIC is looking for detailed quantitative and qualitative technical recommendations that would address its objectives around CRP Due Diligence:

- Reduce/eliminate "blind" reliance on CRP ratings but retain overall utilization of CRPs ratings with the implementation of a strong due diligence framework. This framework should be extremely robust with focused resources within the NAIC in its implementation and maintenance.
- At the completion of work for this project there should be a quantitative and qualitative due diligence framework design and implementation plan that will permit the SVO to primarily focus on the on-going administration of this holistic due diligence process around CRP usage. That process must be vigorous and consequential (e.g. clear quantitative and qualitative parameters for CRPs utilized to provide ratings for use in assigning NAIC designations).
- Retain ability within the SVO to perform individualized credit assessment and utilize regulatory discretion when needed, under well-documented and governed parameters.
 This "backstop" should be embedded in the regulatory regime, but ideally would be rarely used if other governance is optimized.

Quantitative and qualitative analysis, both initial and ongoing, should be applied to all CRPs and CRP applicants consistently and equally. State regulators and the NAIC are agnostic to the credit rating providers used in the NAIC Designation process, subject to the due diligence framework as established.

The request also includes some aspects of other components of our framework, when impactful to the objectives above. This includes recommendations of how to best utilize and enhance the structured asset modeling capabilities of the SVO and for recommended governance and oversight of the SVO's operations (i.e. the production and oversight of NAIC designations.)

This project should be delivered in two phases. Phase 1 deliverables include recommendations and considerations on how to accomplish the objectives, with consideration to the questions below, and Phase 2 Deliverables will include development of the recommendations into an actionable framework for the NAIC to implement and maintain.

Quantitative Analysis

Currently, NRSROs applying to be a CRP provide their own mapping of NRSRO ratings to corresponding NAIC Designations. The NAIC would like to be able to utilize data in order to validate this mapping and/or establish its own mapping. A key objective is that ratings performance is shown to be representative of those used specifically for NAIC Designations (rather than all ratings issued by an NRSRO, if not otherwise representative of those used for NAIC Designations). For that purpose:

 What analytical approach should be used to compare each rating agency's rating methodology for a given security type, or sector/industry, or more broadly, to use those

- ratings to assign NAIC Designations.
- How should jointly-rated securities (rated by more than one rating agency) and single-rated securities be analyzed? Should they be analyzed differently?
- Should public credit ratings and a private credit ratings be distinguished for quantitative analysis purposes.
- What is the scope of the assessment, i.e. at a rating agency level, or at an asset-class, sector or other specified basis?
- How should the analysis consider economic or financial market conditions over the periods covered, particularly periods of extreme distress for credit such as the Global Financial Crisis, dotcom bubble, junk bond crash, S&L crisis, OPEC oil embargo, or any other major bond market distress event?
- To what extent can the NAIC rely on market usage of ratings to act as a validating tool, and how does that apply to private ratings that are not issued publicly?
- How would the analysis demonstrate that the credit ratings can be used as a proxy for an NAIC Designations?
- How should new investment types, emerging asset classes without quantifiable history, newly established NRSROs, etc. be considered when applying the ultimate framework?

Sources of Data

- What specific fields and definitions would you need from the CRP applicant, the frequency of the observations and the elapsed time period in years or date ranges
- Are NRSRO filings with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission sufficient for this analysis and how?
- Could this analysis be best performed utilizing the NAIC's own data and if so, how that should be accomplished most effectively?
- The NAIC's Structured Securities Group ("SSG") has modeling capabilities, both current and planned, meant to assess the growing structured securities market. How should those capabilities be used to monitor the rating agency ratings on structured securities? What enhancements that can be made to those capabilities to further utilize them effectively?
- What other sources of data would be most beneficial to this process? Preference should be given to data that is most easily obtained.

Other Considerations for CRP Qualifications

- What procedures and policies should be implemented to facilitate periodic, and transparent discussions between the NAIC, regulators and CRPs regarding NAIC's use of ratings, as a consumer, in its regulatory framework, including emerging investments & methodologies, questions NAIC may have on existing investments, discussions the CRPs wish to have with the NAIC, etc? Additionally, what safeguards should be put in place to ensure that the NAIC does not violate the Credit Rating Agency Reform Act?
- What is the overarching process for how the NAIC should implement a review process?
 Initial application, renewal application (what time frame), upon certain triggers such as SEC Violations or other legal actions?
- What are the qualifications that a rating agency should possess to be an input into the NAIC designation process, and how the NAIC should assess those qualifications?

- What should disqualify a rating agency from being a CRP to the NAIC?
- What are any actual, potential or potentially perceived conflicts of interest that should disqualify a rating agency
 from being a CRP to the NAIC, including measurable items such as
 material relationships with insurers or their ownership entity. How should conflicts of interest be
 defined for this purpose and how should they be disclosed to the NAIC?
- SEC Violations or other legal actions and how to assess.
 - If a CRP was to be disqualified based on criteria established, what steps should it take to remediate this at a firm, asset-class, sector or other level.

Ongoing review

- Define an examination process state regulators can utilize to provide oversight of the SVO in its implementation of this framework, its own production of designations and its usage of individualized challenges to CRP ratings in the designation process.
- Define an examination process state regulators can utilize to provide oversight of the SSG in its implementation of this framework, its own production of modeling-based designations (both internally and outsourced), including model governance and validation.



Required Sections and Information

Respondents to this RFP are asked to include the following sections and information in their submitted proposals:

• | Respondent Company Overview

- Concise description and overview of the company and its history.
- Outline of services the company offers, as it relates to requirements outlined in this RFP.
- A brief history and description of any work carried out for NAIC or any NRSRO in the last ten (10) years.
- A brief history and description of delivery of projects of this or similar type.
- A description of the company's familiarity with the state-based insurance regulatory framework and the role of the NAIC, including the Securities Valuation Office.
- A description of the company's familiarity with NAIC designations and how they are utilized in the regulatory framework, including for purposes of applying risk-based capital charges to insures to identify weakly capitalized companies.
- A description of the company's knowledge of credit ratings and credit rating agencies, including measurements of performance and default studies, or a description of the company's access to such information.
- A detailed description of the capabilities and experience of the company to perform the requirements of the project contemplated by this RFP, including experience evaluating data in a complex environment
- Details of the point of contact who will facilitate this project, their biography, experience, and contact information.
- Biographies of key personnel to be assigned to this project, including their role and specific experience and expertise.
- Detailed description of three to five similar engagements completed, noting projection duration and total cost, and a client reference for each.
- Disclose in detail any actual, potential or potentially perceived conflicts of interest of your firm or anyone working on this initiative may have analyzing rating agencies, issuers of securities with ratings (public or private) or investors in securities with ratings (public or private). Note it is recognized that these types of relationships will normally occur in concert with the familiarity and expertise this initiative requires, and that any actual, potential, or potentially perceived conflicts of interest will not automatically disqualify your firm or anyone working on this initiative.
- Any other information that the respondent feels relevant / useful as it pertains to the requirements outlined in this RFP.

• | Detailed RFP Response / Proposal

Respondents should prepare a detailed RFP response / proposal that addresses the objectives of the preceding section, including:

- A detailed narrative on how you anticipate approaching this project*
- What methodology(ies) you will utilize
- What data sources you will utilize
- What resources you will require from the NAIC, SVO and regulators
- Any initial conclusions or recommendations regarding the outcome of this project

*The first item above (approach to project) is considered the most important aspect of the respondent's proposal. Please consider this in your proposal as well as how the approach incorporates the methodology and data sources.

Project Plans

Project plans for completion of the analysis outlined in this RFP, that include, to a reasonable amount of detail:

- Key tasks, activities, milestones, and deliverables.
- Relevant timelines, schedules, and input / decision points.
- Any critical assumptions and / or dependencies.

Acceptable formats for the project plans include MS Project and MS Excel.

Analysis Approach

Additional detail and relevant supporting information on the proposed software or analytical tools and processes to be used within the development of the CRP Due Diligence framework and how they relate to and impact the proposed Project Plan, Resource Plan, and Budget and Contingency Plans.

Resources Plan

Detailed resource plans to deliver the CRP Due Diligence framework, as outlined in this RFP, that include, to a reasonable amount of detail:

- Resources (both vendor and NAIC) required.
- Hours per week, by resource (both vendor and NAIC).
- Location (on-shore, off-shore) of vendor resources.
- Rates (costs per hour) of vendor resources.

The resources plans should align to the project plans (in terms of key activities, milestones,

and deliverables) and the fee schedule / pricing information.

Fee Schedule and Pricing Information

Detailed fee schedules, total projected budgets, and other pricing information for phase, including assumptions on:

- Additional Expenses (e.g., travel, lodging, meals, etc.)
- Technology costs (e.g., hardware, software licensing, etc.) to set up and maintain the CRP Due Diligence framework .
- Key Milestones and Deliverables (and how they relate to payment phasing).
- Recommended financial contingency provisions.

The NAIC will consider both fixed-fee and "time and materials" bids for development of the CRP Due Diligence framework.

Project Management

A detailed explanation of the project management tools, processes, and approaches to be used on the project, including:

- How vendor resources will integrate with NAIC resources.
- A communication plan (including key tasks, activities, milestones, resources needed, etc.) for the
 project explaining how key stakeholders will be engaged and kept updated on progress to date,
 hours / budget vs. plan, issues, and input and decisions needed, etc.
- A change management plan (including key tasks, activities, milestones, resources needed, etc.)
 for the project explaining how effective change will be delivered across all stakeholders to ensure the long-term success of the modernized CRP Due Diligence framework.
- Project governance considerations.
- A project risk assessment and risk management plan.

• | Additional Required Documentation

Respondents must provide the following information as part of their proposal:

- W-9 Form.
- Certificate of Insurance for Worker's Compensation.
- Certificate of Insurance for Professional Liability.
- Certificate of Insurance for Cybersecurity.
- Signed NAIC Conflict of Interest Form (see Appendix 1).
- Vendor Standard Terms and Conditions (if you do not agree to, or if they vary from the NAIC Standard Terms and Conditions, see Appendix 2).

• | Additional Instructions

- Please reference RFP-XXXX on all parts of the proposal.
- Please ensure you have provided the following Point of Contact Information:
 - NAME
 - COMPANY
 - EMAIL
 - PHONE

Proposal Submission

Proposals must be received by 5pm Central time on May 15, 2024, via email to Jim Woody at Proposals@naic.org.

RFP Provisional Timeline

	ACTIVITY	DATE
1	NAIC Issuance of RFP	
2	NAIC public posting of RFP on website + press release	
3	NAIC hosted project clarification & Q&A Session register here	
4	Vendor intent to Bid due to Proposals@naic.org	
5	Vendor RFP questions due to Proposals@naic.org ⁸	
6	NAIC responses to vendor questions ⁹	
7	Vendor proposal submissions due to Proposals@naic.org	
8	NAIC notice of selection for vendor interview ¹⁰	
9	Vendor Interviews	
10	NAIC issuance of award to the selected vendor - projected	
	Projected Project Start Date	

The NAIC reserves the right to change or alter timing and activities as appropriate.

Point of Contact

Any questions regarding the requirements outlined in the RFP should be directed to Proposals@naic.org by Month, Day, Year.

Questions related to any other matter should be directed to NAIC Chief Financial Officer Jim Woody at JWoody@naic.org, who is the NAIC point-of-contact for this RFP.

^{*} NAIC's Executive Committee has the final authority to direct contract execution for the selected vendor.

⁷ Potential respondents are asked to submit an email indicating their intent to bid by Month, Day, Year mail to Jim Woody at Proposals@naic.org.

⁸ Each respondent is asked to send a single set of questions (vs. multiple sets of questions) related to RFP and response requirements.

⁹ Submitted questions will be anonymized and responses to all questions will be posted to the NAIC website.

¹⁰ The NAIC reserves the right to interview a limited number of bidders based on its evaluation of the submitted proposals. Submission of a proposal does not guarantee an interview.

Selection Process

A committee including NAIC senior leadership has been designated to review the proposals, interview selected bidders, and, if appropriate, select a vendor to complete the scope of work outlined in this RFP.

This committee will also conduct regular progress meetings with the selected firm during the development and demonstration of the Proof of Concept, and during the Mobilization Planning phase.

Assessment Criteria

The following factors will be considered in making the vendor selection:

- Knowledge and understanding of NAIC systems, processes, and organization.
- Knowledge of the specific requirements and ability to understand the project.
- Experience with similar projects.
- Qualifications of staff dedicated to project.
- Professional reputation of the firm.
- Proposed project costs and timelines.
- Quality of project plans.
- Completeness of proposal.
- Proven ability to provide the identified deliverables on time and within budget.

Presentations

Based on responses, NAIC reserves the right to request a presentation of the RFP response and demonstration of capabilities included in the RFP response document.

Presentations are currently scheduled to take place from Month, Day through Month, Day, Year.

Conflicts of Interest

The NAIC recognizes that, given the broad scope of this project, any vendor with the experience reasonably necessary to produce the work may have certain conflicts of interest based upon past associations with regulators or industry participants.

These conflicts of interest will not automatically disqualify the vendor, but the vendor must have verifiable policies and procedures in place designed in compliance with established industry standards to address conflict-of-interest issues that may arise.

All relevant items must be approved prior to contract execution by NAIC's Acting Chief Executive Officer/COO/CLO.

NAIC Reserved Rights

The submission of a proposal does not guarantee an interview with the selection committee or a demonstration of capabilities to the committee.

The NAIC reserves the right to reject any or all proposals, request new proposals, or request additional information.

NAIC also reserves the right to further negotiate with any or all bidders.

The NAIC also reserves the right not to award a contract for this project.

Reasons for not awarding a contract could include, but are not limited to:

- Lack of acceptable proposals.
- An inability to come to terms with a vendor.
- A finding that insufficient funds are available to proceed.

The NAIC also reserves the right to redirect the project as is deemed advisable.

The NAIC also reserves the right to cancel this RFP at the direction of its membership.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1	NAIC Conflict of Interest Form
Appendix 2	NAIC Standard Terms and Conditions

Appendix 1 | NAIC Conflict of Interest Form

Any Entity that desires to contract with the NAIC must complete this form, including suppliers, consultants and purchasers of goods or services. All potential conflicts must be disclosed and approved before contract execution.

CERTIFICATION	• ("Entity") did not provide gifts, favors, membership points or any other benefits to any employee or representative of the NAIC to affect the bidding and selection process for this contract.
	 Entity did not and will not receive gifts, favors, membership points or any other benefits from any employee or representative of the NAIC in connection with the negotiation or implementation of this contract.
	 Entity owners, principals and employees negotiating or implementing this contract on behalf of Entity are not former NAIC employees unless disclosed below.
	 Entity owners, principals and employees negotiating or implementing this contract on behalf of Entity are not immediate family members of NAIC employees unless disclosed below.
	The signatory below is a duly authorized representative of Entity and hereby certifies to the authenticity and veracity of this disclosure.
	Authorized Entity Signature Date
	Print Name & Company Name
DISCLOSURE	DISCLOSURE OF POTENTIAL CONFLICT
	NAIC CEO or COO Date

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STANDARD TERMS AND CONDITIONS

<u>for</u> <u>NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF INSURANCE</u> <u>COMMISSIONERS PURCHASE ORDERS FOR</u> SERVICES

As used herein, "Seller" means the person, firm, or corporation to whom this Purchase Order is issued; "Buyer" means the National Association of Insurance Commissioners, a nonprofit Delaware corporation.

- 1. Acceptance of Terms and Conditions. Seller agrees to perform the services ("Services") described in any purchase order ("Purchase Order") in accordance with these Terms and Conditions. Upon acceptance of a Purchase Order or upon commencement of Services, Seller shall be bound by these Terms and Conditions and all provisions set forth on the face of any applicable Purchase Order, whether Seller signs or otherwise acknowledges these Terms & Conditions or the Purchase Order, unless Seller objects to such Terms and Conditions in writing prior to commencing Services.
- 2. **Revocable.** This writing does not constitute a firm offer and may be revoked at any time prior to acceptance.
- 3. **No modification.** No agreement or other understanding in any way altering the terms, prices or conditions of the applicable Purchase Order or these Terms and Conditions shall be binding upon Buyer unless made in writing and signed by Buyer's duly authorized representative.
- 4. Termination. Buyer may immediately terminate the Purchase Order upon written notice to Seller if Seller fails to perform or otherwise breaches these Terms and Conditions, files a petition in bankruptcy, becomes insolvent, or dissolves. Buyer may terminate the Purchase Order for any other reason upon thirty (30) days' written notice to Seller. Upon receipt of notice of termination, Seller shall cease to provide Goods and/or perform Services pursuant to the Purchase Order. In the event of termination, Buyer shall be liable to Seller only for those Services satisfactorily performed before the date of termination, less appropriate offsets. Buyer shall not be subject to any charges or other fees

as a result of such cancellation. Seller may terminate this Agreement upon written notice to Buyer if Buyer fails to pay Seller within sixty (60) days after Seller notified Buyer in writing that payment is past due and that it intends to terminate the Purchase Order.

- Warranty of Services. Seller represents and warrants that all Services shall be completed in a professional, workmanlike manner, with the degree of skill and care that is required by current, good, and sound professional procedures. Further, Seller warrants that the Services shall be completed in accordance with applicable specifications. Seller represents and warrants that the performance of Services hereunder will not conflict with or be prohibited in any way by any other agreement or statutory restriction to which Seller isbound.
- 6. Seller's Indemnification. Seller shall indemnify, hold harmless, and at Buyer's request, defend Buyer, its officers, directors, agents and employees, against all claims, liabilities, damages, losses and expenses, including attorneys' fees and costs of suit arising out of or in any way connected with any claim by a third party against Buyer alleging that the Services infringe a patent, copyright, trademark, trade secret or other proprietary right of third party. Seller shall not settle any such suit or claim without Buyer's prior written consent. Seller shall also indemnify and hold harmless Buyer from any injury to person or property arising out of or caused by Seller's performance of the Purchase Order. Seller agrees to pay or reimburse all costs that may be incurred by Buyer in enforcing this indemnity provision, including attorneys' fees.

- 7. Compliance with Laws. Seller shall comply with all laws and regulations of federal, state and local governments, including without limitation, laws and regulations dealing with fair labor standards, civil rights, and public contracts. Seller further warrants that all Services performed pursuant to the Purchase Order have been produced or performed in compliance with such laws and regulations and Seller agrees to indemnify Buyer for any liability resulting from such noncompliance by the Seller.
- 8. **Price.** The price to be paid by the Buyer shall be the price contained in Seller's bid and/or the price stated on the face of the Purchase Order whichever is less. Seller represents the price contained in Seller's bid is no higher than Seller's current prices on orders by others for similar products or services under similar or like conditions and methods of purchase.
- 9. **Invoices.** Seller shall submit invoices on each Purchase Order after each delivery. Buyer shall not be charged sales tax and shall furnish a tax exemption certificate upon request. Discounts will be taken from the date of acceptance of services or date the invoice is received by Buyer whichever is later. Buyer shall retain the right of offset.
- 10. Force Majeure. Buyer shall not be liable for any failure to perform including failure to: (1) accept performance of Services, or, (2) take delivery of the Goods as provided if caused by circumstances beyond Buyer's control which make such performance commercially impractical including, but not limited to, acts of God, fire, flood, acts of war, government action, accident, labor difficulties or shortage, or the inability to obtain materials, equipment or transportation.

Seller shall not be liable for any failure to perform including failure to: (1) provide Services, or (2) deliver Goods as provided if caused by circumstances beyond Seller's control which make such performance commercially impractical including, but not limited to, acts of God, fire, flood, acts of war, government action, accident, labor difficulties or shortage, or the inability to obtain materials, equipment or transportation.

- 11. Insurance. Seller shall be responsible for maintaining adequate auto, workers' compensation, unemployment compensation, disability, liability and other applicable insurance, as is required by law or as is the common practice in Seller's trade or business, whichever affords greater coverage. Seller shall carry Comprehensive General Liability coverage and Umbrella or Excess Liability coverage with minimum limits of \$1,000,000 per occurrence and \$2,000,000 in the aggregate for property damage and bodily injury. Upon request, Seller shall provide Buyer with certificates of insurance evidencing adequate coverage naming the Buyer as additional insured.
- 12. Limitation of Liability. IN NO EVENT SHALL BUYER BE LIABLE TO SELLER OR SELLER'S AGENTS, OR ANY THIRD PARTY FOR ANY INCIDENTAL, INDIRECT, SPECIAL, OR CONSEQUENTIAL DAMAGES ARISING OUT OF, OR IN CONNECTION WITH, THIS AGREEMENT, WHETHER OR NOT BUYER WAS ADVISED OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.
 - Confidentiality. In the event Seller gains written or oral confidential information of or from the Buyer, Seller agrees not to reveal to anyone or make use of such knowledge and information at any time for any purposes except as necessary in the course and scope of provision of Goods or performance of Services specified hereunder. Upon termination of the Purchase Order, Seller agrees to deliver to Buyer all such confidential information or work product belonging to Buyer.
- 14. **Assignability.** Seller shall not assign or subcontract this Purchase Order or any of its rights or obligations hereunder without the prior written consent of Buyer. Any assignment or transfer without such written consent shall be null and void.
- 15. **Publicity.** Seller shall not use Buyer's name in any form or attribution in connection with any solicitation, publicity, advertising, endorsement, or other promotion.

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- 16. **Survivability.** Any obligations and duties, which by their nature extend beyond the expiration or termination of this Purchase Order shall survive the expiration or termination hereof.
- 17. **Choice of Law.** This Purchase Order shall be construed in accordance with, and disputes shall be governed by, the laws of the State of Missouri.
- 18. **Severability.** If any provision of this Purchase Order shall be deemed to be invalid, illegal, or unenforceable, the validity, legality and enforceability of the remaining provisions shall not in any way be affected or impaired thereby.

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Do you agree to the NAIC Terms & Conditions? Please sign one.

YES	Signature	Date
NO	Signature	Date
If NO,	Please provide your Terms and Conditions of Servito the NAIC Terms & Conditions attached.	rices if you do not agree