

Quality Begins with QBS

The selection of a consulting engineer is one of the most important decisions you will make in completing a successful project. While the cost of engineering services for the average facility represents less than one percent of the total lifetime cost of construction, operation and maintenance, the design can have a major impact on all other costs. Investing in quality design services at the outset of the project often results in long-term savings.

Cost effective problem solving and high quality design can only be achieved with competence and experience. The Qualifications Based Selection (QBS) process helps clients find the design consultant most qualified for their project. It is a time proven method endorsed by federal, state, and local government and used by many private sector owners and institutions.

Following this simple method, consultants are selected first on competence, creativity, and performance and second, on negotiation of a fair and reasonable price. By selecting a consulting engineer based on price competition you limit the professional's resources to undertake a thorough analysis of a problem and to search for innovative solutions. You also deny yourself access to the most valuable assets the professional has to offer: *Creativity* and *Professional Judgment*.

STEP ONE: Request for Qualifications

Prepare a formal Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for a proposed project and distribute to a select list of firms. Ask respondents to indicate their interest in the project and illustrate their relevant project experience and overall capabilities to perform the services required for the project. The initial RFQ should include the following:

- A description of the proposed project.
- Any special expertise of unusual services that might be required.
- A time schedule for the overall project, including the selection process to retain a consulting engineer.
- A list of selection criteria (e.g. geographic location of firm, small business set-aside, or current workload staff).

"If you deal with the lowest bidder, it is well to add something for the risk you run, and if you do that, you have enough to pay for something better."

--John Ruskin

"Because QBS not only gives you the opportunity to select the most qualified firm to do the work, it also provides you with flexibility in terms of negotiating price"

--Glenn A. Furtado, P.E.
Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission

STEP TWO: Evaluation of Firms

Evaluate the written qualifications of the firms and select the top three to five firms to be interviewed. The evaluation should be based on the following factors:

- Individual qualifications of personnel as a team.
- Overall experience of personnel as a team.
- Ability of team to perform within time constraints.
- Firm's awareness of project's issues, opportunities and constraints.
- Project team's experience on similar projects
- Quality of past work.

- Performance evaluation from past clients.

STEP THREE: Interview

Arrange for interviews with top firms. An evaluation form with predetermined selection criteria should be allocated between interviews to allow interviewers to complete the evaluation form. The evaluation form should include the following components:

- Project team management plan.
- Previous experience of project team.
- Location and quality of office facilities.
- Project control measures to monitor schedule and budget.
- Project approach.
- Quality of work on similar projects.
- Awards and past client recommendations.
- Financial stability of firm.

WHY QBS?

Many state and local governments, as well as private industry, have followed the lead of the federal government in the procurement of consulting engineering services based on Qualifications Based Selection. In 1972, the U.S. Congress recognized the merits of competition based on qualifications and established **U. S. Public Law - 92-582** which states that *"The Congress hereby declares it to be the policy of the Federal Government to publicly announce all requirements for architectural and engineering services and to negotiate contracts for architectural and engineering services on the basis of demonstrated competence and qualifications for the type of professional services required and at fair and reasonable prices."* In addition, the **American Bar Association** has endorsed this Qualifications Based Selection and negotiation process in its "Model Procurement Code for State and Local Governments."

Remember that Qualifications Based Selection does not mean that you can not negotiate a fair and reasonable price for services. It does, however, mean that price is negotiated after competent, qualified professionals are selected by you. Most importantly, it means that our buildings, bridges, roadways, and waste water treatment facilities will be designed in the most competent and cost effective manner, not only for today, but also for the future.

THE QBS PROCESS - SUMMARY

The basic QBS process to be followed by a client in the selection of a consulting engineer consists of the following steps:

- Prepare a description of the project and request qualifications from a select list of firms.
- Evaluate these firms based on both their qualifications and select three to five firms to be interviewed.
- Conduct interviews with the most qualified firms and rank firms based on both their qualifications and the interview.
- Select highest ranked firm for detailed negotiations of scope of work, contractual terms and compensation.

- Overall team ranking.

STEP FOUR: Selection/Negotiation

Select the top-ranked firm and initiate the negotiation for the scope of work, the terms and conditions of a contract and compensation. The negotiation process includes the following:

- Preparation of comprehensive proposal by top-ranked firms.
- Presentation of work, schedule and level of effort by the top-ranked firm.
- Agreement on scope of work, schedule fee, and areas of responsibility and liability.
- Preparation of written contract binding both parties to agreement