A GUIDE TO WRITING PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS FOR A BUILDING PROJECT
A GUIDE TO WRITING A PROFESSIONAL SERVICES REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP) FOR A BUILDING PROJECT

The success of a project depends largely on the selection of an able, experienced and reputable professional prime consulting team. There are a number of ways to select a prime consultant team for a building project, ranging from contracting with a familiar team of professionals to holding an architectural competition. Many public organizations are required to make their selection process transparent and competitive to demonstrate to the public that they have chosen responsibly. The often-used Request for Proposals (RFP) process is either open to all professionals or follows an Expression of Interest (EOI) phase that allows for the compilation of a shortlist.

Because hiring a prime consultant for a building project is not the same as purchasing a commodity or basic service, the RFP is a critical tool in the selection process. Building projects are highly complex, multi-faceted activities with many unknowns. A qualified prime consulting team will address these unknowns with all their creative, technical and management skills and the result will be long-term value. The RFP and the resulting proposals must be thorough and fair to allow comparison of the professional services available.
RFP CONTENT CHECKLIST

1. Invitation
2. Objectives of Proposal Call
3. Key Selection Dates
4. Project Description
   a. Background
   b. Scope of Services
5. Construction Budget
6. Project Schedule
7. Project Delivery Method
8. Required Information
   a. Experience
   b. Project Team
   c. Management Capability
   d. Timelines and Deliverables
   e. Professional Services
   f. Insurance
   g. References
9. Owner Contact
10. Submission Requirements
11. Evaluation Criteria
12. Proposal Conditions
   (Including Terms of Engagement)
13. Debriefing Procedure
RFP CONTENT EXPANDED

INVITATION

Invite proposals while giving proponents an idea of the type of project, its location and the scope of services needed.

Example: “Architects are requested to submit proposals for full prime consulting services for a renovation and addition to XYZ School in Louisville.”

OBJECTIVES

Outline what this project aims to achieve, what it is responding to and features that may be unique about it.

KEY SELECTION DATES

- State the date and time the proposals are due.
- State the anticipated period during which interviews may take place (if applicable).
- State the anticipated date of award of the contract.

Commentary: It is important to the project to allow a long enough timeframe for staff to prepare the RFP and for consultants to respond with questions because without this time for scrutiny there may be misinterpretations that later translate into additional services or costs to the project. Keep in mind that prime consultants must gather and coordinate relevant information from their sub-consultants for presentation in the proposal.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

BACKGROUND

Outline the project location, relevant history, project mandate and share any photos, drawings or reports that would be useful. If a functional program exists this and any site information should be included. Sometimes it is wise to offer a site visit and documents can be made available for viewing at that time.

Commentary: The importance of a functional program cannot be overstated. This is an additional service typically done before the more traditional designated design services begin. A thorough functional program is the foundation of a successful project.

SCOPE OF SERVICES

Describe briefly the scope of services required of the consulting team. Typically Architectural, Structural, Mechanical and Electrical are a package carried together and described by one fee. Use the AAA/APEGGA Recommended Conditions of Engagement for terminology and typically included services. The Designated Services Summary Chart on page 7 and 8 is a useful reference.

Additional services need to be noted, as does the need for any special consultants that are being retained directly by the owner but require coordinating by the prime consultant. If there are unusual administrative or approval procedures required by this project they should also be noted.
CONSTRUCTION BUDGET

A clear disclosure of available funds for the building construction is critical. If this is a budget number representing funds that are not yet completely secured then this also needs to be made clear.

Do the construction budget numbers include a construction contingency or will a contingency be carried separately by the owner?

Are there other project costs that may expand the scope of work for the consulting team? Examples of this would include equipment, furniture, and other unique features.

PROJECT SCHEDULE

Indicate key dates in the project schedule. Also important are time constraints, seasonal conditions, economic or human resource factors and if phasing may be required.

PROJECT DELIVERY METHOD

How will the contractor be engaged and what will be the manner of project delivery?

Commentary: A Stipulated Sum Contract that makes use of a design/bid/build delivery method is considerably different than a Design Build Contract. For the proposals to be accurate in their descriptions and comparable to one another, they should have this information as it affects the consulting teams’ deliverables considerably.

REQUIRED INFORMATION

EXPERIENCE

Ask for the team’s relevant experience, qualifications and special abilities.

PROJECT TEAM

Request that they identify the responsible professionals in all disciplines, the managers, the technical experts, those who will administer the contract and any others contributing to the project. This should include staff in-house and those who are sub-consultants.

Commentary: In some situations it can be preferable to have the owner help select the sub-consultants instead of having them chosen in isolation by the Prime Consultant at the RFP stage. It is common to ask for resumes of key team members to be attached in an appendix.

MANAGEMENT CAPABILITY

Invite prime consulting teams to outline strategies and skills used to manage the project’s expectations, resources, budget and to ensure quality control.

Commentary: This should not be considered an opportunity to ask for a project schedule that includes a description of methodology, as the preparation of unique documentation of this type is too time-consuming at this early stage when there is no certainty around a contract.
REQUIRED INFORMATION (con’t)

TIMELINES AND DELIVERABLES
Ask the prime consultant to demonstrate availability of noted team members and that the required technology and/or contracts can be in place to produce the deliverables in the time required.

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES
Itemize clearly the designated services required and note the related professional fee budget that is being carried. The terminology used in the AAA/APEGGA Recommended Conditions of Engagement is understood in the industry and strongly suggested. Minimum recommended fees for different building types are also noted for budgeting purposes. The AAA/APEGGA document terminology matches that of the standard contracts used on a majority of projects across Canada.

Disbursements should be an estimated amount that is additional to the professional fee budget. It should be clearly stated what sort of costs the disbursement budget covers.

Commentary: Disbursements usually include regular printing, copying, photography, mileage, travel meals BUT DO NOT COVER the tender document printing (always abundant and unpredictable), additional WCB coverage, additional project insurance coverage above industry standards and assorted other unique requests.

INSURANCE
Note the type and quantity of insurance required. Ask for proof of this coverage. Standard contracts identify the required insurance types and are a good guideline.

Commentary: Increasingly professionals are submitting copies of the RFP to their insurers for review prior to submission. This is done to ensure that there aren’t requirements of the RFP that would invalidate coverage. Enough time should be left in the schedule for proposals to be vetted this way.

REFERENCES
Request references from client groups and organizations, consultants, and/or contractors that bear relevance to the proposed project.

OWNER CONTACT
Name a contact person within the organization who is both familiar with the project and authorized to answer questions during the proposal preparation period. A method for sharing the questions and answers of all proponents will be needed. The information resulting from all questions should be immediately available to every proponent through the proposal preparation period.

Commentary: It is not safe to assume that the RFP is ‘fool-proof’ and will not generate some questions requiring clarification. The questions are likely to be of a technical or professional nature and therefore beyond the expertise of most organizations’ procurement officers.
SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

Identify the name and address of where the proposals should be delivered. Indicate any format requirements, maximum number of pages and the number of proposal copies needed.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

Outline the evaluation matrix that the selection team will use to review the proposals. Offer an outline of the relative weightings of the evaluation categories. It should be clear to the proponents what is important to the owner in the evaluation process. Ensure the evaluation categories directly reflect what is requested in the RFP.

Commentary: It is assumed that the owner has disclosed the professional fees budgeted for the project and is not requesting professionals to bid for the work. Any sign of the fees being considered in the evaluation process signals that low fees are evaluation criteria. To employ a true Qualification Based Selection (QBS) process the owner and favored prime consultant enter into fee negotiations following the completion of the RFP process, with the understanding that if an agreement on fees cannot be reached then the second choice prime consultant will be approached. The cost of the professional prime consulting team represents approximately 1-3% of the total life cycle cost of the project. High quality professional services translate into project savings.

PROPOSAL CONDITIONS

Identify any legislative requirements unique to this project and any protocol the successful team will have to follow. Indicate the type of Client/Architect Contract that will be undertaken. Include the contract if there are any revisions to one of the standard contracts used in the industry.

Commentary: Tampering with the standard Client/Architect Contract has many repercussions. Revising the professionals’ scope of service, shifting or eliminating responsibilities and creating ambiguities are all likely to result in the Contract’s author being open to more risk. The standard contracts used in the industry are documents that represent all interests, are constantly updated and have been tested in courts across the country. These contracts represent a balanced contractual arrangement that owners are advised to implement.

DEBRIEFING PROCEDURE

Indicate how debriefing will be done for both the successful and unsuccessful proponents following the award of the contract.

Example: “One week following the announcement of the selected team, unsuccessful proponents may call the RFP Contact to obtain a verbal debrief.”

Commentary: Given the amount of time invested in each submission, it is appropriate to give feedback to the proposal authors when approached for it. This will contribute to a better RFP, to better proposals and to mutual respect amongst the professional teams.