

## A QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE PROCESS FOR EVALUATING TECHNICAL PROPOSALS

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### ABSTRACT

In Texas, as many as twenty technically qualified consulting firms have submitted proposals to the Texas Low-Level Radioactive Waste Disposal Authority each time a request for proposals has been released. It is the policy of the Authority to evaluate each proposal fairly and objectively, and it is often more difficult to separate preferences based on past performance from other equally suitable proposals. This paper presents the process the Authority has developed to solicit, review, and select proposals and then contract for the top proposal.

### INTRODUCTION

Contract processes can range from simple sole source agreements to complex negotiations. Sole source contracts should be used when small, quick, or special purpose projects are required. For large, lengthy, and/or multiple discipline projects, a competitive process may be more desirable to gain a broader survey of interest and expertise.

Most of the entities formed to satisfy the Low-Level Radioactive Waste Policy Act of 1980 have already begun to execute contracts for services. The Texas Low-Level Radioactive Waste Disposal Authority has developed a quantitative and qualitative process for evaluating technical proposals. This process, formed out of varied staff experience in dealing with large technical contracts, helps the Authority make fair and objective decisions and provides proposers with substantive feedback on their proposals.

### REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS BACKGROUND

Before a request for proposals (RFP) is released by the Authority, three steps must be taken. First, a formal determination of need must be exhibited and supported by documentation. The draft RFP is written with supporting arguments for approval. Second, the fiscal officer of the Authority must certify that funds are available for the project. Finally, executive and board approval must be obtained.

After approval, an RFP is submitted to the Texas Register for printing and then mailed to individuals and companies on the agency mailing list. The RFP contains all of the information required to prepare a response.

### REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL CONTENT

The following outlines the content of the Authority's RFPs.

#### Heading

Each RFP contains the following items in the heading: agency identification, the full name of the agency; the RFP title, a self-explanatory title reflecting the intent of the request; and the RFP number, a numerical designation assigned by the Authority for tracking purposes.

#### Description of Authority and Statutory Mandate

Identification of the requesting entity (the Authority) and the statutory authority to issue the RFP is presented. Other general information such as the mission of the Authority and the definition of low-level radioactive waste is also included.

#### Description of Concern Addressed by the RFP

This section is used to highlight the general provisions and requirements of the RFP, complete with an overview of the intent.

#### Detail of RFP's Specific Objectives

Specific objectives of the Authority is documented in this section, complete with tasks to be accomplished.

#### Proposal Format

This section specifies the general format of the proposal. In the interest of uniformity, proposals should be assembled and submitted in the following order: cover page, executive summary, technical section, administrative section, financial section, qualifications and experience section, and appendices.

The cover page should include the RFP title and number; name and address of the proposer; name, address, and telephone number of persons to be contacted concerning technical and contractual matters; and signature of the proposer's authorized representative.

The executive summary should be prepared to stand alone by presenting the major points of the proposal in succinct form. A brief discussion of the technical objectives, time frame, qualifications, experience, etc. should be included. The executive summary should be five pages or less in length.

The technical section should address specific details necessary to accomplish the objectives of the RFP. Support of background knowledge of the work objective and the method of and time table for accomplishment should be included in this section. It may be desirable to project numbers of man-hours expended on each object or task. References used in the technical section should be indicated by number and the reference section detailed in the appendices.

The administrative section should include a brief but complete discussion on how the project will be conducted, personnel who will be responsible for each accomplishment, and a flow chart reflecting administrative control for proposal accomplishments.

In regard to the financial section, for procurement of contract services, the Authority issues an RFP either in accordance with Article 6252-11c, V.T.C.S., relating to the use of private consultants by state agencies, or Article 664-4, V.T.C.S., the Professional Services Procurement Act (engineering services). Because of the Canons of Ethics of Registered Professional Engineers, it is illegal to submit a proposal for engineering services that presents a budget. Financial information to support proposals in compliance with Article 6252-11c must be of sufficient detail for competitive consideration, while proposals under Article 664-4 will not require detailed financial supporting data, but should reflect information such as number of man-hours dedicated to complete tasks or objectives.

The qualifications and experience section should include only resumes of those personnel who will be working on the project. Previous work performance and support of proposer's qualifications should be limited to specific projects which relate directly to the request subject matter. A complete listing of all pertinent accomplishments, i.e., unrelated projects, is neither requested nor desired. If consultants or subcontractors are included in the proposal, letters of commitment should be appended as confirmation.

The appendices are not mandatory and are allowed so that supporting information considered essential by the proposer may be included. Appendices are accepted only if submitted under separate cover.

Voluminous proposals are not desired; the Authority specifies that 20 to 30 pages of narrative should be adequate to respond to RFPs.

#### Final Report Format

Details and specifics for preparation of the required final report for each proposal are contained in the project contract. The report customarily follows the style consistent with the author's professional society association unless specified otherwise, but at a minimum should contain the following: title page, table of contents, executive summary, and technical report, including tables, figures, supporting data, and conclusion. Ten copies of the final report are required. The Authority has prepared a report manual which specifies the format and style of contract and staff reports.

#### Project Administration

This section details the Authority's method for project oversight, including designation of a project administrator and a method to track progress via periodic reports. Generally, report requirements will coincide with billing and payment schedules.

#### Criteria for Evaluation

This section discusses the approach that the Authority will use in evaluating proposals. Each proposal will be screened to ensure overall compliance with the RFP and then evaluated for qualifications and experience, technical approach, and administrative concerns.

#### Disclaimer

All RFPs contain the disclaimer that the Authority reserves the right to reject any or all proposals.

#### Proprietary Data

Information submitted by proposers and contained in the proposal is subject to the Texas Open Records Act; therefore, submission of confidential or proprietary data is discouraged. If included at all, the data should be contained in the appendices and clearly marked as confidential. The Authority will endeavor, but cannot guarantee, to maintain the confidentiality of such data.

#### Presubmission Conference

A date, time, and location for a presubmission conference is set for each RFP the Authority issues. The conference is conducted in an informal manner so that proposers will have the opportunity to obtain any information necessary to respond to the RFP in an adequate manner.

#### Proposal Submission

Each RFP issued contains specific requirements for submitting proposals, including the deadline and address for submission and the number of copies required.

#### Schedule for Completion

Each RFP stipulates target dates for completing the project addressed. Because the date of the contract award may be flexible due to the negotiation process, the deadline will be set using a specified number of days from the contract award date.

#### Contract Award Date

A projected award date is set with consideration for sufficient time lapse to accomplish negotiations following the review and evaluation procedure outlined and beginning with the proposal receiving the highest consensus rating.

#### Authority Contact

An employee of the Authority is designated as the Authority contact so that prospective proposers can obtain additional information as needed to respond to the RFP. Authority staff attempt to respond to all questions so long as confidential concerns of another proposer are not divulged.

#### PROPOSAL HANDLING

Proposals are numbered numerically as received, and the date and time of receipt are noted. Receipt means "in the hands of the Authority". Proposals post marked prior to but not received prior to the deadline are not considered.

#### PROPOSAL EVALUATION

Each proposal is independently reviewed by the Authority's technical staff and by at least one outside evaluator with experience in the field of interest. As discussed earlier, proposal evaluation is separated into evaluations of qualifications and experience, technical approach, and administrative factors, including financial and management considerations.

Evaluation sheets are prepared for each evaluation area and for each RFP. The basic format of evaluation sheets continues from RFP to RFP, but the substance of the sheets changes based on necessary disciplines, technical considerations, etc. Each item on the evaluation sheets is assigned a raw score, and weighting factors are usually applied.

Qualifications and experience evaluations are based on necessary disciplines to perform the work, years of individual experience, and years of corporate experience in a directly related project. In some cases, separate qualifications and experience statements are requested prior to submission of technical proposals. This allows for a screening of proposer capabilities. The top five proposers can then be short-listed and technical proposals requested. This saves time and money on the part of the proposers and evaluators.

Evaluation of technical portions of proposals include judgements of technical approach and knowledge of the problem. The presentation of factors that are considered to be essential elements of the technical approach are individually graded and weights are applied.

Administrative factors such as personnel loadings, project control, and critical path management are also graded. Caution should be exercised in requesting budget information from proposers for engineering contracts because it is a violation of

state law in some states to request "competitive bids" for engineering services. However, it is entirely appropriate to specify a budget limit in the RFP.

The qualitative aspect of the evaluation process is also important. For each area which is graded, space is provided for comments which support the grade.

As mentioned before, grade sheets are prepared for each RFP. They all contain the same qualitative evaluation characteristics; however, the format of the grade sheets can vary. The Authority can supply copies of evaluation forms which have been used with previous RFPs.

#### CONCLUSION

It is often difficult to make fair and objective contracting decisions for services. Sole source contracts may be appropriate at times, but in most cases, a competitive process is more desirable in terms of both prospective contracts and the quality of work to be performed. It is important to be able to defend a contracting decision on objective and documented technical grounds. A systematic, qualitative, and quantitative evaluation process is the best approach for all concerned. The Authority's proposal review process has been complimented by most proposers as a fair and impartial process. This is the way business should be conducted.