



REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS OR REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

Which one do I use?

By Steve Davis, AIA



RFQ VS. RFP: WHICH ONE DO I USE?

Having been in the architectural field for over 30 years, I have had opportunity to respond to several RFQs (Request for Qualifications) and RFPs (Request for Proposals). Often, there seems to be confusion about which one to use. This article will help you clarify when to use an RFQ or RFP.

REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS

An RFQ (Request for Qualifications) is a qualifications-based selection process. It is NOT a bid. It is a request for firms to submit their qualifications to be considered for a project. It is applicable for professional services (similar to legal services) where a city or county is not required to take competitive bids

In some states, it is not required for RFQs to be advertised. Check with your legal counsel for what is allowable in your area.

The intent of an RFQ is to allow you to select who you feel is the most qualified for your project. You do have the opportunity to negotiate a fee with your final selection. If you cannot come to terms, you always have the option to go to your second or third choice.

This is an appropriate method of soliciting for various professional services including architectural, engineering, and construction management agency.

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

An RFP (Request for Proposals) is a request for firms to submit their proposal for a project. It is applicable for goods or services where a city or county is required to take competitive bids resulting in a final product/building. Check with your legal counsel for what is allowable in your area.

The intent of an RFP is to allow you to select the most qualified company at the best price for your project. RFPs for services typically involve more than a price request including a company's history, capabilities, and financial information.

This is an appropriate method to solicit construction services including general contractor, design-builder, and construction management at-risk. Frequently RFPs will include the phrase "best-lowest," which allows the owner to consider more than just the lowest price.

When considering RFP/Bid response in a public setting, you must have a strong reason not to select the lowest bidder e.g. past performance problems, litigation, etc. You typically cannot decide to go with the second lowest proposal/bid because they're the local or some other reason. Check with your legal counsel for what is allowable in your area.

WHY WOULDN'T I ASK FOR A FEE FOR PROFESSIONAL SERVICES?

The old adage holds true here and "you get what you pay for." Professional fees are pretty competitive, and a small percentage of the overall life of a project. If you request a fee in your solicitation, professional service providers will look to limit the services they'll provide to keep their costs down and "win" the project. This can often result in more change orders and ultimately higher construction costs.

In Charles Nelson's "Cutting Designs Fees Raises Construction Costs" article, research shows "93% (contractors) indicated that design and documentation quality did influence the price submitted for a tender (bid), while 75% indicated that it also had an influence on the time allowed for a project." Later in the same article, Nelson shows that an extra 1.5% in architectural fees can result in as much as 7-11% decrease in construction costs.¹

Architectural fees are competitive and as a result, the "average" fee range an owner might expect can easily be found. Once you know that, you have a baseline range of what might be a fee you could expect from your architect. Now you can go about selecting the "best" architect for your project.

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RFQ REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS

- Qualifications-based selection process
- NOT a bid
- For professional services where a city or county is not required to take competitive bids
- Allows you to select who you feel is the most qualified for your project
- Negotiate a fee with your final selection. If you cannot come to terms, you always have the option to go to your second or third choice.
- Use to solicit for various professional services including architectural, engineering, and construction management agency

RFP REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

- Request for firms to submit their proposal for a project
- For goods or services where a city or county is required to take competitive bids resulting in a final product/building
- Allows you to select the most qualified company at the best price for your project
- More than a price request
- Use to solicit construction services including general contractor, design-builder, and construction management at-risk

HOW DO I FIND THE MOST QUALIFIED ARCHITECT FOR MY PROJECT?

Request architects to submit their qualifications to do your project. Review the submittals, call references, and do online research to see if there are any “skeletons in the closet.” After doing your due diligence, narrow the choice down to a few you’d like to interview. You want to make sure you can get along with and trust your selection. A face-to-face meeting can provide you a more subjective evaluation.

WHAT GOES IN AN RFQ?

There are online templates for writing RFQs, and often times your local architect may be able to provide you a sample to edit, but the main components are the following:

COVER LETTER

- At a minimum, state who is making the request, what services are being requested, and submittal deadline date for “qualified” firms to submit their responses

RFQ BODY

General Instructions outlining:

- Request: Repeat of cover letter’s information including who and what is being requested
- Schedule: Date submittals are due, date for selecting shortlisted firms, date for potential interviews, and date for decision
- Fee: The following verbiage, or something similar to, should be included: “The owner name will begin contract negotiations with the firm determined to be the most qualified. In the event that a contract cannot be negotiated with the first firm, the owner name reserves the right to negotiate with the next qualified firm(s) until a contract can be reached.”

Submittal Instructions stating:

- Number of copies and/or electronic submittals required
- Submittals to be delivered in sealed envelope marked “Name of Project”
- Name and address submittals are to be sent to
- Questions to be submitted in writing to “contact name” at “contact information”

Statement of Scope stating specific service(s) being requested:

- Outline of the scope of services being requested. Best if this can be done in a bullet/outline format. This allows responders to better organize their submittal and is easier for reviewers to critique, as it provides for an apples-to-apples comparison.

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Submittal Content, listing items by section to be included in the submittal, for review. Listing by section helps responders organize their submittal and makes it easier for reviewers to critique. You may want to include a page limit for the submittal in the Submittal Content section to make it easier for responders and reviewers. Suggested Submittal Content may include:

- Cover Letter (one page)
- Section 1: Identify Firm(s) including name, address, phone number and contact person regarding this RFQ (one page)
- Section 2: Provide an organizational chart identifying disciplines, specific personnel, and role of those who will be assigned to this project (one page)
- Section 3: Describe your project approach for this project (two pages)
- Section 4: Firm's capacity (e.g. number of full-time licensed architects). Provide resumes and workload for people assigned to this project—refer to staff listed in Section 2. (maximum one page per person)
- Section 5: Detail firm's quality control process with regard to design, document control, and construction administration (one page)
- Section 6: Firm's litigation history and ask, "Do you have any pending litigation or binding arbitration with a client?" (one page)
- Section 7: Copy of your firm's current professional liability or errors and omissions insurance (one page)
- Section 8: List firms last five (5) similar projects including size, location, and contact person (maximum 5 pages)
- Section 9: Describe what makes your firm uniquely qualified for this project (one page)

WHAT GOES IN AN RFP?

There are online templates available to help you write an RFP. Your architect may also be able to provide you a sample to edit. Here are a couple online resources available: Form-Based Codes Institute (<http://formbasedcodes.org/sample-rfq>) or Voice Marketing (<http://www.more-for-small-business.com/rfq-template.html>).

The requested information will vary, depending on the construction services being requested—general construction, design/build or construction manager at risk.

Requested information may be similar to the RFQ including firm, team member roles and experience, project approach, similar project experience, and unique qualifications.

Unlike an RFQ, an RFP will contain a section requesting fee, bid or method of determining the fee for the requested services.

LOCAL JURISDICTION

Local bid laws have varying stipulations and requirements for soliciting and receiving RFP proposal responses.

Professional services RFQs tend to have fewer stipulations and requirements. In some jurisdictions, there is not a requirement to solicit RFQs.

In either case, seek legal advice from your local attorney.

¹"Cutting Designs Fees Raises Construction Costs" feature article. Charles Nelson, AIA, LFRAIA. Project Management magazine. February 2014. Volume 23, Issue 2.

GET TO KNOW: STEVE DAVIS, AIA SENIOR ARCHITECT



800.798.8104

sdavis@shive-hattery.com

Being a 6-foot-6-inch tall Architect means I usually stand out in a crowd. I enjoy engaging with people, hearing about their backgrounds, likes and dislikes, and finding things in common. It's one of the best perks of my 25+ year career. During that time, I've learned that a majority of my clients, especially at the municipal or county level, have never done a building project before. They frequently understand they have a need, but have no idea the process or how to begin. This can be an intimidating and daunting task, and I really enjoy being able to come along side and help.

I've enjoyed walking clients through the process, have helped with needs assessments, facility evaluations, and site selection; and have lead numerous successful public awareness campaigns for funding votes.

Helping my clients ask the right questions, find the right solutions, and work through their first building project is very exciting. I listen to my clients, work hard to look out for their best interest, and see that they get what they expected. In the process we build consensus, often between parties with competing interests, so there's buy-in by everyone in the end. It's important to me to always be honest, even if I don't always tell them what they want to hear, and I find most people respect that. My clients can trust in me that I will bring my experience while understanding that ultimately this is their project, and I am not here to "push" my ideas on them.

My focus on justice design has given me experience with dozens of justice projects in ten different states including a multitude of projects types (courts, municipal and county law enforcement centers, and adult and juvenile detention facilities). Projects have been as small as a two-bed jail remodel to complete justice centers, including multiple courtrooms, court support, jail and sheriff's office. Big or small, I enjoy helping my clients realize their goals.