



# Requests for Proposals (RFPs)

## *A Good RFP Saves Everyone Time and Money*

### **Prepare RFPs Early**

The RFP is usually your (the client's) first step in retaining a consultant for a new project. If you already have an established and successful relationship with a consultant, the RFP can be relatively brief and informal, because you may be able to source your engineering requirements and deal directly with a group you know and trust. In fact, depending upon the circumstances, your RFP may be entirely verbal, and you will rely on the consultant to properly document the scope of the proposal in writing, as you require.

If an established relationship does not exist, or policy requires that you obtain several competitive proposals, it is normal to prepare an appropriately detailed RFP that outlines the project and provides details of the consultant selection procedure. Appropriate selection procedures are set out in the CEBC publication Guide to Selecting a Consulting Engineer and are also contained in the CEBC Directory of Member Firms.

### **Benefits to the Client**

- It forms an effective foundation for a successful project
- It leads to identifying the consultant who will provide the best combination of technical expertise, service and value
- It provides the basis for an efficient and equitable consultant selection process
- It helps to attract the best consultants

### **The RFP Format is Simple**

The RFP normally has two components: the Terms of Reference (TOR) which outline the technical scope of the project; and, the Commercial Terms which specify the content of the proposal submission and the consultant selection procedure. Prepare check lists of these to ensure that the main areas are covered, as noted herein. The extent to which all points should be included will depend upon a number of factors, including the magnitude and technical complexity of the project.

### **Key Components of the Terms of Reference**

- Project description and objectives
- Project history and relevant background information
- Special or unusual project issues
- Currently available technical information, such as previous reports, mapping, legal surveys, geotechnical information and monitoring data
- Proposed scope of consulting services
- Project deliverables such as inspections, technical reports, computer analyses, construction drawings and contract documents
- Special or non-engineering project needs such as land acquisition, public hearings, environmental reports, permits, tariff evaluations
- Client requirements for project management and reporting in addition to the purely technical components of the assignment
- Expected project schedule
- Anticipated level of participation by the owner in the project

## Key Components of the Commercial Terms

- Outline of the consultant selection process and schedule
- Due date and time for submissions, with full address of recipient
- Process for handling queries during the proposal process including the name of a contact
- Details of any proposed briefing meetings and/or site inspections
- Number of consultants invited, and, where possible, company names
- Proposal format, i.e., letter form or bound document, and number of copies
- Required proposal contents, such as sections addressing;
  - *project understanding*
  - *work plan / methodology*
  - *corporate structure and history*
  - *references*
  - *project staffing plans*
  - *staff resumes*
  - *related experience of key project staff*
  - *details of manpower allocation*
  - *proposed schedule*
  - *budget*
  - *fee basis*

*Note: A request for all these data would only be appropriate for larger projects. For smaller ones it would be sufficient to request the names and related experience of key staff, an outline of the work plan, schedule, fee basis and budget.*

- Basis for proposal evaluation
- Requirements for proposal presentation meeting

## Proper Scope & Budget Make Life Easier

If the project requires a finite deliverable, such as a detailed design or site inspection of construction, it is normally not necessary for you as owner to specify the budget in the RFP. In most cases, the Consulting Engineering Industry is fully capable of identifying the likely cost, provided you have adequately detailed the scope of the project.

A study assignment, however, is a different situation since its level of effort and hence cost can vary widely. Without some guidance on how much work is required, the consultant may well have great difficulty in deciding how much effort is appropriate. If you indicate you place a high priority on cost, the consultant may be led towards submitting a low budget proposal. This approach may result in an absolute minimum of time being expended on the study with commensurate quality of result. The level of analysis, and hence quality of result, are usually proportional to your budget signals.

For this reason experienced owners will usually identify the study budget to indicate the amount of effort to be invested by the consultant. Owners with limited experience will find it beneficial to informally review the study objectives and proposed budget with one or more consultants before finalizing the RFP. This will help to ensure that the budget established is appropriate for the scale and complexity of the project.

### Common Abbreviations

**RFEI** - Request for Expressions of Interest  
**RFP** - Request for Proposal  
**RFQ** - Request for Qualifications  
**SOQ** - Statement of Qualifications  
**TOR** - Terms of Reference

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