

POLICY STATEMENT 304 - QUALIFICATIONS-BASED SELECTION OF PROFESSIONAL ENGINEERS

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POLICY

The American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) believes that the selection of Professional Engineers as prime consultants and subcontractors should be based on the qualifications of the engineering firm. Qualifications including education, training, experience, past-performance, capabilities, personnel and workloads should be evaluated when selecting an engineering firm.

Cost of engineering services, while important and meriting careful negotiations, is related to work to be performed which often is not clearly defined at the time the engineer is selected. Therefore, selecting consultants based on cost is not recommended.

ASCE supports qualifications-based selection (QBS) procedures such as those specified by the Brooks Architect-Engineers Act of 1972, 40 U.S.C. 1101 et seq., the numerous similar state and local laws, and the American Bar Association's Model Procurement Code for State and Local Governments for the engagement of engineering services. ASCE recommends that the application of these procedures to the development of a scope of work and the selection, procurement and administration of contracts for engineering services be the responsibility of technically qualified staff of the project owner.

ISSUE

Often an owner may believe that the pivotal issue in the selection of a professional engineer is the cost of services. Also, an owner may perceive that accepting the low price to perform the services produces the project with the lowest total cost. In some instances, engineering services are essentially subject to bids based on the lowest offered fee, regardless of professional qualifications or anticipated services to be rendered.

Contrary to these beliefs, the relevant experience, ability and specific technical approaches of the proposing design professionals are far more important to the overall

quality, utility and life-cycle cost of any project than is the initial engineering fee, which is invariably a relatively small percentage of the total project cost.

RATIONALE

The QBS procedure is characterized by three basic steps: (1) the owner evaluates and selects the professional engineer based on demonstrated qualifications and experience in the required types of services without considering fee; (2) the owner and the selected professional engineer confer to determine and/or review the scope of work, including contract scheduling; and (3) a fee for engineering services is negotiated based upon the mutually developed scope of services. In the event a mutual agreement on scope of services and fee is not achieved, the owner may negotiate with the next most qualified professional. Thus, cost is addressed at the appropriate time after the scope of services has been fully defined.

The cost of engineering services, while important and meriting careful negotiations, is generally a relatively small percentage of the overall cost to plan, design, build, operate and maintain a project and may be related to work that is not clearly defined at the time the engineer is selected. Therefore, selecting consulting firm services based solely on cost is not recommended.

ASCE Policy Statement 304
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