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- ☞ *“Why is the hiring of a design professional to design a project any different from hiring a general contractor to construct a project?”*
 - ☞ *“As a Purchasing Agent, don’t I have a responsibility to get the most I can for the least amount of money spent, or an obligation when purchasing goods or services with public dollars to see that the lowest price is obtained?”*
 - ☞ *“Why is the likelihood of the success of a project reduced simply because the services of the design professional for the project are obtained through the bidding process?”*

Design professionals do not sell a commodity, but rather their knowledge. Architectural and engineering design work is a highly skilled and personally distinctive service. Because of this, design professionals encourage owners to select them on the basis of their experience and qualifications to do the work.

The Reality of Bidding

A system that simply seeks the cheapest design cost is bound to produce lower quality projects – not every time, but most of the time. A design firm’s approach to a project must change when fee becomes a major criteria for selection.

These firms may develop a means of cutting their time on a project by minimizing the level of service such as:

- ◆ *Using less experienced personnel and evaluating fewer alternatives.*
- ◆ *Developing plans with minimal details that often require much layout and decision-making in the field by the contractor.*
- ◆ *Selecting systems that are easiest to design as opposed to selecting those that are the most economical and cost-effective for the owner over the life of the project.*
- ◆ *On a structural project, designing only the most heavily loaded members, and then repeating these conservative member sizes throughout, resulting in oversizing of most members.*
- ◆ *Providing minimal review of the drawings and observation of the work during construction, leaving the owner with lower quality construction and higher maintenance costs.*

Qualifications is the Solution

A qualifications-based selection (QBS) process allows the owner to choose the firm determined to be most qualified by objective criteria, whereas selecting design professionals by low bid takes this process out of the hands of the owner.

The owner’s challenge is to get a good “return” on the investment in design services. This may be achieved by selecting a qualified A/E and negotiating the appropriate scope and compensation to permit the A/E to work toward a successful constructed project.

QBS has the advantages that:

- ◆ a well qualified firm is selected
- ◆ a scope of work satisfactory to both parties is negotiated
- ◆ a mutually agreed-upon price is paid for the services
- ◆ a team approach (partnership) between the owner and consultant can be developed so that both parties have an interest in the project’s success.

Groups who endorse or support the QBS process include:

- The American Institute of Architects (AIA)
- National Society of Professional Engineers (NSPE)
- American Public Works Association (APWA)
- American Water Works Association (AWWA)
- American Bar Association (ABA)
- The Associated General Contractors of America (AGC).

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**Other publications available through ACEC.
Please contact our bookshop:**

- ◆ ***Bidding is not the Solution: Case Studies in Bidding*** #364
- ◆ ***Negotiating for Design Professional Services: Estimating, Negotiating, Contracting*** #235-97
- ◆ ***Design/Build: Understanding and Implementing*** #306
- ◆ ***A Guide to Qualifications Based Selection of Design Professionals: A Key to Quality*** #354
- ◆ **APWA's "Red Book"**
Selection and Use of Engineers, Architects and Professional Consultants: Guidelines for Public Agencies
(Ask by name)
- ◆ ***Qualifications Based Selection of Design Professionals by Public Owners: Video Series*** #746-V

QBS Products Disclaimer

Nothing in this product is intended or should be intended to prohibit any member of the American Consulting Engineers Council (ACEC) from submitting price quotations at any time during the design professional selection process or to suggest that to do so is unethical, unprofessional or contrary to ACEC policy. Nor should this document be read as in any way prohibiting any project owner from requesting such submissions.

ACEC does, however, advocate that public owners voluntarily adopt the qualifications-based approach when not mandated by law to select design professional services. Conversely, private non-governmental owners may wish to consider the QBS process as one means to procure such design professional services.

Any revisions, reviews, or other alterations to this document should be reviewed by ACEC's General Counsel's office before being disseminated.



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The Reality of Bidding

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