

## Criteria Used to Select an Engineering Firm

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The cost of design services for an average facility represents less than two percent of the total lifetime cost of construction, operation and maintenance. Investing in quality design services at the outset of the project can result in long-term savings in terms of a more efficient layout, occupant safety, durability, occupant satisfaction, ease of future expansions, and others.

The initial impulse of some owners who have a need for design and construction administration services is to request prices from several engineers or architects and to select the one that submits the lowest price or bid for the services requested. At first thought, viewing these services as a commodity rather than a professional service may seem to make sense. But a closer look into issues that impact the successful completion of a construction or renovation project reveals that an initial low bid does not necessarily result in the lowest overall cost or a better value to the building's owner, manager or users. In fact, there may be many other reasons not to use price as the primary factor in the decision process.

Cost-effective problem solving and high-quality design services can only be achieved with competence and experience in the type of project being proposed. To help owners through the process of finding a qualified professional the Qualifications Based Selection (QBS) process was developed in the early 1970s for the federal government. The Connecticut QBS Council was established in 1992 and has, at no charge, assisted numerous building owners and managers through the proven QBS process.

A seasoned facilitator, experienced in the construction industry, works with public agencies and private industry by offering guidance, forms and advice to help them through the selection process.

Following this simple method, a consultant is selected based on the firm's qualifications for that project, creativity and past performance. Then, the scope of services is mutually developed which becomes the basis for negotiating a fair and reasonable price. This assures that the best firm to do the job is selected. Should the owner and selected firm not be able to agree on a reasonable price, the firm that scored next best is contacted for negotiations.

Qualifications-based selection is a tried-and-true concept, which has been required by law for all federal projects since 1972. In Connecticut, State law requires that the DAS Division of Construction Services and the Department of Transportation use the QBS process. In addition, the QBS process is endorsed by the American Public Works Association and included in the American Bar Association's Model Procurement Code for State and Local Governments.

Selecting a design professional is one of the key components of a successful project. The design team's performance can influence the entire course of the project: financial, feasibility, public response, design, functional efficiency, construction costs, and maintenance costs during the life of the project. That's why it is essential that you get the right design professionals for this critical job. The Connecticut QBS Council was established in 1992 and has, at no charge, assisted numerous building owners and managers through the proven QBS process.

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### **The QBS process can be summarized in four steps:**

- The owner announces that he or she needs professional design services for a particular project and invites interested firms to submit information about their qualifications, their experience and a brief description of the technical approach they would follow.
- The owner then reviews the qualifications and selects a "short list" of three to five firms.
- The owner interviews each firm to discuss its qualifications, experience, and approach to the project.

- The owner ranks the firms and invites the top firm to negotiate a formal agreement. The negotiations include discussions about the owner's goals and concepts of the project, the firm's approach to the project, alternatives to be considered, and the specific scope of work. After a detailed scope of services is agreed upon, the firm's fee is negotiated. If an agreement cannot be reached, which is unusual, the owner negotiates with the next highest rated firm.

The Connecticut QBS Council has experienced, knowledgeable, independent facilitators to assist elected officials, building committees, municipal staff and private owners in establishing a selection process tailored to their particular needs.

The facilitator program is free to owners, both public and private. The QBS Facilitator works "one-on-one" with agencies to assist the owner in developing a process for selecting a competent and qualified design team. His job is to provide information, draft materials, offer guidance, supply directories of design professionals, and provide other resources. He doesn't try to influence the selection of any particular design professionals or firms. He will not participate in the selection process itself or act as an intermediary in negotiating a contract.

The Connecticut QBS Council is a non-profit organization sponsored by the American Council of Engineering Companies of Connecticut; the American Institute of Architects, Connecticut; and the Connecticut Association of Land Surveyors. For more information visit their website.