

SELECTING ARCHITECTURAL AND ENGINEERING FIRMS

The selection of architectural, engineering and surveying professionals by public entities is not the same as the process that is often used by private owners. It is important to know that Montana Codes Annotated govern how public entities hire for architectural, engineering and land surveying services. The details can be found in Title 18 (Public Contracts), Chapter 8 (Procurement for Services), Part 2 (Architectural, Engineering, and Land Surveying Services): http://leg.mt.gov/bills/mca/title_0180/chapter_0080/part_0020/section_0040/0180-0080-0020-0040.html. The sections prior and after Part 2 are also informative.

The law ensures that public entities hire the most qualified firm to provide the services required for the proposed project. To determine which firm is the most qualified, the following criteria, as set forth in state law, are used:

- Qualifications of professional personnel to be assigned to the project;
- Capability to meet time and project budget requirements;
- Location;
- Present and projected workloads;
- Related experience on similar projects; and
- Recent and current work for the agency.

REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS

In order to determine which firm is the most qualified to provide services for a proposed project, GFPS submits a Request for Qualifications. This is a publicly posted notice that details:

- Project Requirements
 - The District tells about the project
- Typical Submittal Requirements
 - The District typically asks for this kind of information that aligns with the criteria above:
 - Statement of Interest/Cover Letter
 - Description of firm's relevant experience with projects of similar size and scope
 - List examples of your firm's specific experience with programming, designing and completing projects of similar scope and size on time and on budget.
 - References and contact numbers from previous representatives of projects completed of similar size and scope
 - Proposed staff and relevant experience
 - Current work load
- Details of the Submittal
 - The District tells the firm when, where and how to submit the information above.
- The Selection Process
 - The District describes:
 - How the submissions will be assessed by a District appointed committee
 - The criteria are announced and weighted. For example:
 - Experience with projects of similar size and scope in this region 35%
 - Key team member qualifications and experience 25%
 - Capability to meet time and project budget requirements 20%
 - Local professional resources to be utilized for this effort 10%
 - Recent and current work for Great Falls Public Schools 5%
 - Current and projected workloads 5%
 - How many candidates with the highest numeric scores will be "shortlisted" and invited to interview at the District's facility with the selection committee.
 - How unsuccessful candidates will be notified

- How the District will enter into negotiations with the highest ranked candidate and what happens if negotiations are unsuccessful
- Timelines involved

You can review some of the RFQ documents that GFPS has completed at this website:

<http://gfps.k12.mt.us/content/expired-rfqs-and-rfps>.

REVIEW OF RFQ SUBMITTALS

On a given day, at a given time, the District’s Facility Selection Committee meets to review the RFQ submittals. The Committee is typically comprised of the Board Chair, a second trustee, the superintendent, an assistant superintendent, the principal of the facility, the business operations director, and supervisor of buildings and grounds. Each Committee member reviews the submittals and scores utilizing the predetermined weighted criteria. The scoring is compiled and via consensus, the Committee decides if interviews are warranted and if so, who will be interviewed.

INTERVIEWS OF SELECTED FIRMS

As with selecting an employee, interviews provide an excellent opportunity for the District to get to know the firm and for the firm to get to know the District. It provides an opportunity for both parties to share expectations and information, and to ask questions.

Depending on the number and quality of RFQ submittals received, the District may or may not conduct interviews of firms. The District reserves the right to make the selection of the preferred firm based on the submittal information alone, and may decline to conduct the interview stage of the selection process.

If interviews are held, the process is standardized. Each firm gets the same amount of time and is interviewed by the Facility Committee. This Committee is the same group of people that also reviewed their written materials.

The Committee members individually rank the firms based on who they feel is the most qualified firm to provide the services required for the proposed project. This is typically a difficult decision for the Committee as all the interviewed firms are qualified to do the project, or they wouldn’t have been asked for an interview. The Committee is charged however, with determining the firm that is the MOST qualified. The rankings are compiled to determine the highest ranked firm.

NEGOTIATIONS WITH SUCCESSFUL FIRM

After the interviews, the District will enter negotiations with the highest ranked firm. If negotiations are unsuccessful with the highest ranked firm, the negotiations will be terminated and start anew with the second ranked finalist, and thus, until a suitable agreement can be reached.

BOARD ACTION

The Board takes official action at publicly noticed Board meeting to hire the successful firm. This action can be taken contingent upon successful negotiations and can take place at a regular Board meeting or a special Board meeting.



At the completion of this process, the firm then begins to conduct the work of the project.