

TWO-STEP Selection Process for A/E Services

If the anticipated project cost is more than \$3,000,000 and A/E services are more than \$100,000, begin the procurement process with the following steps:

First Step

1. Establish a selection manager and a selection committee.
2. Develop a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) document.
3. Advertise the RFQ.
4. Evaluate the submitted Statements of Qualifications (SOQs).

Second Step

1. Interview 3–5 highest-scoring “finalist” firms.
2. Evaluate the interviews.
3. Select the highest-scoring firm for negotiation for potential contract. (If negotiations are unsuccessful, select the next highest-scoring firm, and so on).

Generally, the TWO-STEP procedure means: one submittal step AND one interview step for respondents.

FIRST STEP

1. Selection Manager and Selection Committee Appointment

The borrower should appoint a qualified procurement, contracting, or other capable staff member to serve as selection manager in facilitating these recommended procedures. The selection manager should appoint appropriate staff members or appropriate stakeholders to serve as a selection committee.

Selection committees should be cross-functional teams, comprised of varied, unbiased, responsible, and professional individuals. The selection committee may include representatives from the borrower’s lead staff, facility operations/maintenance, departmental managers, or other internal stakeholders.

For the TWO-STEP process, the voting members of the selection committee should be limited to three to five individuals, not including the selection manager. The selection manager is responsible for facilitating the processes and will be a non-voting member. It is important to verify that there are no real, perceived, or potential conflicts of interest before finalizing selection committee members.

2. Develop a Request for Qualifications Document

This is a “qualifications-based selection” process. No fee or cost information can be requested in the RFQ. The selection manager, with input from the selection committee, should develop the project-specific selection criteria to be communicated in an RFQ document by asking themselves: “What characteristics define the best A/E firm for this project?” (Criteria) and “What qualifications information should we use to judge firms accordingly?” (Deliverables). Selection committee should consider deliverables to include into the RFQ documents.

Three to four major categories of evaluation criteria should be established to allow ease of understanding by all firms and for efficient evaluation by the selection committee. Stability of the Firm, Relevant Experience/Technical Qualifications of the Firm, Previous Performance (references) of the Firm, and Suitability of the Firm are examples of major categories of criteria typically used in many selections. The selection committee should assign appropriate weights to the major criteria categories, which should be communicated to all firms in the RFQ.

However, the selection committee should establish appropriate, “granular” criteria, e.g., years of experience of the firms’ proposed project manager in similar projects. Granular criteria should be grouped as a component of a major category. Appendix 2 provides full examples of granular criteria.

The selection manager must collaborate with the selection committee to establish the schedule of events, required deliverables of prospective respondents, required minimum qualifications, and anything else necessary to communicate in the RFQ.

The sample RFQ document for TWO-STEP process (in Appendix 3) provides examples of deliverables and a typical schedule of events.

Interested firms should be given appropriate time to respond to the RFQ. The RFQ should communicate the schedule of the decision-making process. The selection manager should adhere to the listed schedule of events.

3. Advertise the Request for Qualifications

Once the RFQ is complete, a public notice announcing the procurement opportunity is prepared by the selection manager. The public notice should be posted according to borrower requirements and for public viewing at the Georgia Department of Administrative Services’ (DOAS) Georgia Procurement Registry website—http://ssl.doas.state.ga.us/PRSapp/PR_index.jsp.

The public notice should be posted at least 30 calendar days prior to the due date for Statements of Qualifications in response to the RFQ. In addition, if it is deemed advantageous, the public notice may be published in an appropriate general circulation newspaper or other medium in the vicinity of the project location. Newspaper advertisements should reference the DOAS website as the medium for project details and appropriate documents. For efficiency, more than one project may be advertised in a single newspaper notice. An example of a public notice is included as Appendix 1.

The public notice should provide the following information:

- Title of the solicitation/project opportunity,
- Location of the project,
- Name of the project,
- Type of service being procured for the project,
- Link to the RFQ,
- Due date for all responses to the RFQ, and
- Borrower’s contracting officer or point of contact.

After the project has been advertised in the Georgia Procurement Registry, interested firms should not conduct any communications about the solicitation/project with any person other than the specified single

point of contact for the procurement. The RFQ should communicate that failure to adhere to this restriction may result in the disqualification of the firm's submittal.

The RFQ document must be posted electronically on the Georgia Procurement Registry. The selection manager must keep an accurate list of all inquirers and respondents to the advertisement. The list may include specific contact and address information and should be maintained as a part of the overall project procurement record.

4. Evaluate the Submitted Statements of Qualifications

As the deadline for SOQs approaches, the selection manager should remind the selection committee about pertinent information, e.g. critical meeting dates, evaluation locations, etc. It is helpful at this point for the selection manager to provide the voting members with a concise Guideline for Evaluation document summarizing member duties/deadlines, a quick reference to the deliverables expected in the submittals, and the evaluation criteria. (See example in Appendix 4)

The selection manager should develop scoring forms which correspond to the major criteria categories/weighting, for the selection committee, to provide for an accurate scoring summary. The scoring form should be as intuitive for the scorer as possible, with clear indicators of scorer number, project, RFQ number, proposing firms, criteria, weighting/points, and scores. (See example below).

Upon receipt of the submittals, copies of all SOQs received and validated by the selection manager should be immediately provided to the selection committee with scoring forms. Each member of the selection committee should review each firm's submittal carefully, frequently referring to the stated evaluation criteria and required deliverables in the RFQ. *Note: if less than three total submittals are received, the borrower may choose to cancel the procurement and re-advertise, or, with appropriate written justification to the file, may continue the selection with less than the required number of firms.*

If applicable in this RFQ (usually only if "Previous Performance" is a first-step criteria). The form may serve as a scoring tool using information received from submitting firm's references who are successfully contacted. (See example in Appendix 5) The selection manager may contact references or get assistance in contacting the references.

Each member should individually score the submittals in each main criteria category using a scoring table or form with the assigned weighting. An example of scoring for one member is below:

SCORER 1 FORM					
RFQ Number ####, ##### (Project Name)					
	Stability 10 possible pts. (weight)	Experience and Qualifications 35 possible pts. (weight)	Suitability 35 possible pts. (weight)	Past Performance 20 possible pts. (weight)	Total Points (100 possible)
Firm A	8	30	25	15	78
Firm B	7	28	30	12	77
Firm C	8	25	32	15	80
Firm D	9	25	32	18	86
Firm E	7	20	25	10	62

In the above example, "Firm D" is the highest-scoring respondent, with "Firm C" and "Firm A" second and third, respectively. This should be a preliminary score, however. Before members turn in scoring forms, an evaluation meeting or conference call should take place to give members an opportunity to discuss the merits of the submittals as they relate to the RFQ criteria and deliverables and their scores with other scoring members. Each individual member should present his or her assessment of the submittals and discuss any unique perspectives regarding the criteria that he or she wishes to share. After all members of the selection committee have participated, an open discussion should be held, and the selection committee should determine if it has received enough information to submit individual scoring. Notations are not mandatory but may be attached to scoring forms. However, any notations made must be clear, concise, relevant, and arguably true.

Upon receiving all final scores from selection committee members, the selection manager will tally the scores onto a numerical scoring summary and immediately report the final scoring of firms to the selection committee. Then, the selection manager will ask for the selection committee's approval of the resulting highest-scoring firm. The scoring summary document will serve as a public record for public requests by those interested in the outcome of a selection or as a tool for discussion with unsuccessful respondents.

SECOND STEP

1. Interview of 3-5 Highest-Scoring "Finalist" Firms

The selection manager should promptly post the list of selected finalists as an update to the original advertisement on the Georgia Procurement Registry. All selected finalist firms should be contacted to immediately allow them to prepare for the next step in the process. Email is an acceptable way to make some notifications, but the firm's acknowledgement of receipt is crucial. The "Finalist Notification" will include a requirement for the firms to prepare for an interview by the selection committee. In addition, the notification should specify the steps and requirements in the remainder of the selection process, including the following:

- Statement of appreciation and congratulations to the finalists for their efforts and success becoming eligible for further consideration.
- Attachment or link to additional current program documents (if applicable), standard procedures, and/or specimen contract.
- Schedule/location for interviews. (Sequence of interviews may be determined by drawing or other random means.)
- Criteria for evaluation of interviews.

The selection committee's last action prior to interviewing the finalists should be to develop the interview questions and to determine if there are any desired changes to the format for the interviews from what was described in the Finalist Notification. The interview should provide differentiation between the finalist firms. It should also help the selection committee identify the firm that best meets the needs of the project with respect to the established criteria.

The selection manager should serve as facilitator for the entire interview process. Interviews should take place in one or more rooms dedicated for the interviews. A separate room should be provided exclusively for selection committee discussion. It is advisable to have refreshments available to the selection committee members due to the length of the sessions and to have time for breaks between sessions.

All finalist firms must be interviewed in accordance with the Notification to Finalists and any subsequent instructions to finalists. The order of the interviews should be pre-determined at random by a drawing at the site visit or at another earlier time. The recommended time to be allotted to each firm for the interview process should not exceed 90 minutes, comprised of:

- 15 minutes for setup,
- 60 minutes for the interview—30 minutes for the firm's presentation and 30 minutes for selection committee questions, and
- 15 minutes for knockdown.

Electronic presentations, such as PowerPoint presentations, may be allowed (but not required), and may comprise the full 30-minute presentation time. If the firm is using electronic presentation, the presenter may be required to use her or his laptop and projector for quick setup within the allotted set up time. All members of the selection committee must be present during all of the presentations and interviews. Other guests of the borrower may be present in the audience for training purposes or selection committee support, but they must obey all instructions of the selection manager. Finalist firms should be limited to six or fewer representatives for the interview. Finalist firms are not allowed to address any questions to anyone other than their designated contact prior to the presentation start or after the interview.

Firms should be instructed (in the Notification to Finalists) to focus their presentations on the detailed plan for quality services of the project and any unique characteristics or services the firm offers. Firms are discouraged from reviewing general company history and past experience previously submitted in the Statements of Qualifications unless this information is particularly relevant to the interview. All key project personnel should be present at the interview.

The selection manager must keep time and strictly enforce the time limits of the interview sessions by politely prompting presenters and selection committee members. After each presentation, the selection committee can ask questions of the firm. The questions should not be overly scripted but should be relevant to the project and easily correspond to the stated criteria for the evaluation of the interviews. The questions must be generally consistent from session to session. Relevant improvised or follow-up questions may be asked by the selection committee members, but all members should be generally allowed an equal amount of time for questioning. Upon conclusion of questioning, the firm should be asked to confirm that any consultants proposed on the Project Team and the key personnel identified in the initial submittal are still anticipated to make up the Final Project Team that will provide the services, if selected. Each firm should be advised that, if selected, the Final Team it has presented would become the basis of the contract negotiations. Any changes in the proposed Project Team after this point can be made only with the express permission of the borrower.

2. Evaluate Interviews.

The selection committee must meet immediately or very soon after the interviews to discuss the merits of the presentations and the firms' responses to questions. The selection manager should ask each member to give a synopsis opinion of each of the firms and should engage the members to openly discuss the positive and negative points of the sessions regarding the criteria for the evaluation of the interviews. The selection committee should be allowed to ask any necessary questions of support staff and consultants. Final discussion and scoring, however, should take place in the presence of the voting selection committee members and the selection manager alone. Prior to receiving completed scoring forms (example below)

from all members, the selection manager should ask the members if they have been provided enough information through the process for a definitive selection. If the selection committee agrees that enough information has been provided, the final Scoring Forms are tallied and applied to a scoring summary. Using this summary, the highest-scoring firm is established. The selection committee must then approve the final result. If the final result is approved, the scoring summary will serve as a public record for those interested in the outcome of a selection and as a tool for any debriefings with unsuccessful respondents.

SCORER 1 FORM – EVALUATION OF INTERVIEWS (STEP TWO)				
RFQ Number ####, ##### (Project Name)				
	<i>Presentation</i> 40 possible pts. (weight)	<i>Q & A</i> 40 possible pts. (weight)	<i>Overall Fit</i> 20 possible pts. (weight)	Total Points (100 possible)
Firm A	28	30	15	73
Firm B	35	35	19	89
Firm C	23	25	12	60
Firm D	20	25	12	57
Firm E	17	20	15	52

3. Select the Highest-Scoring Firm for Negotiation for Possible Contract

Upon receiving the approved final result, the selection manager should first contact all interviewed, finalist firms who were not selected to thank them for their efforts and participation. The selected firm is then notified that they have been selected for discussion. Negotiations may then be initiated with the firm to finalize the terms and conditions of the prospective contract, including the fees to be paid.

If a satisfactory agreement cannot be reached with the highest-scoring firm, the borrower will formally terminate the negotiations in writing and enter into negotiations with the second highest-scoring firm, and so on until a mutual agreement is established and the borrower awards an A/E services contract.

The Form of Contract should be developed by or be acceptable to the borrower. After a contract has been executed, all firms should be notified of the award. The selection manager should promptly post the general awardee information as an update to the original advertisement on the Georgia Procurement Registry.

The selection manager shall keep an organized record of all proceedings. The borrower may agree to provide general debriefings to unsuccessful firms. The selection manager should require such meetings to be scheduled after a contract is fully executed with the successful firm. If the borrower agrees to a debriefing, the selection manager must focus the debriefing discussion on positive, objective points primarily related to the successful firm's submittal. Discussion of negative points or deficiencies of any firm and any subjective information such as perceptions and impressions must be strictly avoided in the debriefings.