

**LACKAWANNA COUNTY
QUALIFICATIONS BASED SELECTION PROCESS**

The Lackawanna County Qualifications Based Selection (QBS) Process establishes the procurement process by which professional services (PSs), as defined by Pennsylvania law, are selected for contracts. Lackawanna County establishes a qualifications-based selection process, in which contracts for PSs are negotiated on the basis of demonstrated competence and qualification for the type of professional services required at a fair and reasonable price. Under QBS procurement procedures, price quotations are not the sole consideration in the selection process.

There are seven basic steps involved in pursuing PSs work under QBS:

1. Public solicitation for professional services;
2. Submission of a general statement of qualifications, where applicable, or specific statements of ability to perform specific projects for which public announcements have been made;
3. Evaluation of both the general and project-specific statements;
4. Development of a short-list of at least three submitting firms in order to conduct interviews with them;
5. Interviews with the firms;
6. Ranking of at least three of the most qualified firms; and
7. Negotiation with the top ranked firm.

A brief explanation of each of these steps, along with a description of what is involved in each, follows. The user must be reminded that offices may modify the procedures slightly within the confines of the QBS process with the pre-approval of the County Solicitor and Chief of Staff.

1. Public Announcement

QBS calls for public announcement of opportunities for professional service contracts. Lackawanna County fulfills this obligation by publicizing opportunities in a local newspaper of general circulation and on its website.

These notices should give the location and scope of a project and may also contain such information as:

- Estimated contract award range, if known;
- Project schedule and the date and time limit for receiving replies

- Categories of evaluation criteria and weight factors
- Any requirements for submitting supplemental information.

2. Statements of Qualification

Professional service firms with an interest in being considered for contracts must submit a statement of qualifications to the County through its Chief of Staff. The Chief of Staff will then refer the statement to the respective head of the department for which the service is being solicited. A completed statement should include general information on the size, capabilities, personnel and past experience of the firm.

It is understood that Lackawanna County may request statements of interest and qualifications for special projects or for general professional services. Having a statement on file for general professional services does not constitute a statement for specific professional services. Thus, if a firm has a statement of interest and qualifications on file for general services, it nevertheless should respond indicating that it has interest in a specific project.

When a project is advertised, the County does not notify firms directly that have already submitted statements for general professional services. While the County may include professional service firms, for review and consideration, who have submitted qualifications under a general professional services request, the County is under no obligation to review such qualifications submitted under general professional services when a project-specific request has been published. It is the sole responsibility of the professional service firm to respond to project-specific requests to ensure inclusion in the QBS process.

There is no standard form for a firm's response to a request for qualifications. Any firm wishing to respond should follow specific instructions contained in the County's request.

3. Evaluation of Statements

The evaluation/selection process will be conducted by a board of individuals who, collectively, have experience in the project at issue. The members of the boards are usually appointed from among the professional employees of the county. The board members are appointed by the Chief of Staff in consultation with the County Commissioners. In some situations, private practitioners sit on those boards. Of course, when these private practitioners sit on an evaluation board, they or their firms are not eligible for award of the Specific Project contract.

The evaluation boards then review the statements of interest and qualifications. The Boards must evaluate them in accordance with the criteria cited in the advertisement. For example, some of the criteria in the notice may include the following: professional qualifications and experience of the firm with a specific type of project; experience and professional qualifications of the firm's staff to be assigned to the project; location of the

main office of the proposing firm and its consultants; overall performance record of the firm; and analysis of the firm's current workload.

4. Development of a Short-list

Following the evaluation of the statements of interest and qualifications, the boards prepare reports that recommend the firms to be on the short-list. The reports rank at least three of the firms for the purpose of discussing the project with them. The boards are not limited in the number of firms that they can select for these "interviews"; it is left to the discretion of the boards.

5. Interviews/Discussions with Firms

The interviews usually involve discussions on project concepts and the relative utility of alternative methods of furnishing the required services. Before the interview, the County may send detailed selection criteria and other information about the project to the firms recommended for further consideration.

Usually these interviews are held at the County's office. Occasionally, and in special circumstances, phone interviews are conducted. The interviews are brief, usually lasting only 30 to 60 minutes.

6. Ranking of the "Top Three" Firms

Following the interviews, the boards' reports are presented to the department head or a person who is designated to act as the head on the county's behalf. The reports list, in order of preference, at least three firms that are considered to be the most highly qualified to perform the services. This is considered to be the final selection of the competing firms. If the firm listed as the most preferred is not the firm that was recommended as the most highly qualified by the evaluation board, the head of the department must provide a written explanation for the reason for the preference. The head of the department, or that person's designate, may not add names or other firms to the final report. The report reviews the recommendations of the evaluation board, and, from that, the department head makes the final selection.

7. Negotiations with the Top-Ranked Firm

When the final selection is made by the department head, the contracting officer is authorized to begin negotiations with the top-ranked firm. The negotiations are conducted and the firm is requested to submit a fee proposal listing direct and indirect costs as the basis for contract negotiations. Contract negotiations are conducted following an evaluation of the fee proposal.

If a fee is not agreed upon within a reasonable time, the contracting officer will conclude negotiations with the top-ranked firm and initiate negotiations with the second-ranked firm. If a satisfactory contract is not worked out with this firm, then this procedure will be continued until a mutually satisfactory contract is negotiated. If negotiations fail with all selected firms, the contracting firms, which are ranked by competence and qualifications, are identified. The negotiation process will then continue until an agreement is reached and a contract awarded.