



Qualifications Based Selection

Key Points:

- *The American Bar Association endorses QBS in its “Model Procurement Code for State and Local Governments.”*
- *48 states follow QBS procedures for procuring A/E services.*
- *In recent polling, only 11 percent of voters said they agreed with the viewpoint that “architects and engineers who are hired by government agencies to design and construct public buildings like schools, court houses, hospitals, airports, and prisons should always be awarded to the lowest bidder in order to save money.”*
- *88 percent agreed with the statement, “Because public health and safety is at stake, these contracts should be awarded by selecting the best qualified architects and engineers and then negotiating the best possible fee.”*
- *Every major voter group registered over 80 percent support for the QBS concept.*

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AIA Position

The American Institute of Architects strongly supports Qualifications Based Selection (QBS) for procuring professional design services for public projects. QBS is required for federal projects as described by the Brooks Architect/Engineer Act (Public Law 92-582, 40 U.S.C. 541 et seq.).

Action Sought

The AIA urges state legislators to support the use of Qualifications Based Selection for procuring architectural services.

Explanation and Justification

QBS stands for Qualifications Based Selection. QBS provides owners with a selection process that is not only straightforward and easy to implement, but is objective and fair. It recognizes that design professionals play a critical role in the public building process.

As QBS is predicated on the notion that qualifications, not price, should be the determining factor in selecting an architect, it places fee negotiation at the end of the selection process. While price may have its place within the selection process, it alone should not be the determining factor.

The reason for this is clear: Projects that are contracted solely on price do not take into account the myriad additional factors that go into architectural design. Architectural design is an evolving process and much goes into it after the drawings are signed, sealed and delivered. In fact, one of an architect’s principal duties is to ensure that the construction process goes smoothly.

It is an architect’s experience, expertise and ability to resolve unforeseen problems creatively that will keep a construction project moving forward. These intangibles are common throughout the process. As a result, owners who rely only on a submitted bid as the project cost may be placed in a difficult position if the final cost is significantly higher.

QBS helps resolve the projected vs. final cost dilemma by negotiating the project’s cost with the most qualified firm among the applicants. QBS also fosters a collaborative environment, so the roles of all stakeholders are known, documented and understood. Finally, because the selection process is well-documented, decisions the owner makes are more likely to stand up to public scrutiny.