

QBS 101 - What Every Client Should Know About Qualifications Based Selection

The concept of Qualifications Based Selection (QBS) is not complicated; it is quite simple. This concept is that the firm selected to design a project (or portion of a project) should be the firm that is most qualified to perform the design services. However, this simple concept that qualifications are of prime importance, is occasionally replaced by the idea that hiring the “low bidder” guarantees savings. This usually is far from the truth.

When acquiring design services, the client is acquiring the professional talent, skill, creativity, and effort necessary to meet the client’s objectives. There may be several ways to meet the client’s objectives for the project. Different designers will arrive at different solutions based on the designer’s experience, ingenuity, innovativeness, and knowledge as well as the number of hours available for the design work. The development of the most appropriate solution may require extensive discussions with the client so that both the designer and the client fully understand not only the client’s intent but also the implications of that intent. This is not the same as purchasing paper for the office photocopier or salt for winter ice control.

Project design is not like mathematics, where two plus two equal four no matter who does the calculation. Project design is the culmination of a thorough understanding of the client’s needs, wants, and desires integrated with the designer’s creativity, experience, ingenuity, and familiarity with alternative. The development of the most appropriate design requires not only knowledge but also time to consider alternatives. The first solution may not necessarily be the best solution. All of this requires time and resources that can not be projected based on a simple or even complex “scope of services” statement developed without the input from the design firm that will be responsible for the design work.

The QBS process allows the client to select the “most qualified” design firm and discuss with that firm the services necessary to arrive at the most appropriate design prior to attempting to determine the fees necessary for the design work. The qualifications of the designer have a major impact on the ultimate success of the project. If a slightly higher design fee results in reduced construction costs, or a better solution to the client’s problem, any additional investment in design is worth every penny.

2009 QBS Breakfast Forum a Success

On October 20, 2009 QBS Colorado hosted its second breakfast forum titled *Spending ARRA Funds on Design Projects*. We had over forty five attendees from both the private and public sector. Our three guest speakers represented the public sector: Larry Catalano, PE, Manager of the Capital Projects Division for Aurora Water; Owen Randall, PE, the Senior Utility Engineer for the City of Fort Collins Utilities and Michael Fink, PE, the Water Resource Engineer for the City of Fountain Utilities. Mr. Fink is also a QBS Colorado board member. Each of these agencies is a past QBS Colorado State Award winner and Aurora Water was the runner-up for the 2007 QBS National Award.

Our objective was to discuss in an open forum, Qualifications Based Selection, its importance with regard to ARRA spending, the value it brings to projects, barriers to successful processes, and implementation strategies. Attendees came away with a better understanding of the value provided by the Qualifications Based Selection Process.

Watch for the announcement of our next Forum to be held in the Fall of 2011.

Using QBS for Small Projects

Frequently for small projects, and in smaller communities, many agencies are hesitant to use the QBS process because of the perceived effort required for the procurement process. Sometimes, even state procurement personnel may struggle with effective implementation of QBS for small contracts. For many, QBS is best used on an annual basis (or similar) to select pre-qualified firms for small projects.

Thanks to the dedication, expertise and many hours from a few QBS board members the *QBS Procurement of Professional Services Summary for Small Projects* is complete and ready for use.

This information will help increase effectiveness of small project procurements and to provide ideas for alternative streamlined processes that satisfy the basic intent of QBS. Visit our website www.acec-co.org/qbs to review the Summary or contact Sue Bertram, sue@bertramlaw.net and request a copy via email.

UC-Denver Professor Honored

QBS Colorado recognized Peter Marxhausen, PE, an instructor in the School of Engineering at the University of Colorado-Denver, with the 2009 QBS Colorado State Award for his efforts to educate students on the importance of using QBS while emphasizing professional ethics. Each semester, Marxhausen invites QBS Board Members into his classroom to address his senior engineering students on the importance of selecting the most qualified design professionals by following QBS guidelines. This marks the first time the Award has been given to an individual, rather than an agency.

Marxhausen and QBS Colorado plan to continue to make this QBS discussion a regular part of each semester's Senior Design course. QBS Colorado is very grateful to Mr. Marxhausen for his support of QBS and the opportunity for continued outreach.

If you would like to nominate an agency or individual for the 2010 QBS Colorado State Award please contact Sue Bertram, sue@bertramlaw.net.



QBS Colorado State Award Presentation from left to right: Paul Bakken, P.E. (2009 Chair, QBS Colorado), Peter Marxhausen, P.E., Andrew Garner, P.E. (QBS Colorado Board Member)



For more news, announcements, information, presentations or general and QBS help please contact one of our directors or visit our web site at:
<http://www.acec-co.org/qbs>

RFP Responses

When price-based Request for Proposals are brought to the attention of the QBS Colorado Board, we make immediate contact with the agency. A letter explaining the benefits of following QBS procedures along with one of our brochures and our recent newsletter is mailed; a follow-up phone call from a board member is later placed. In the second half of 2009, we responded to RFP's issued from the following agencies: Adams County, City of Brighton, Denver Housing Authority, City of Federal Heights, and La Plata County. Early 2010 RFP responses have been sent to Englewood/Littleton Wastewater, City of Durango, and Garfield County.

Forward copies of current RFP's that violate Federal Law or Colorado's Mini-Brook's Bill and other RFP's seeking professional design services based on price competition to Sue Bertram at sue@bertramlaw.net and the QBS Colorado Board will respond appropriately advocating the use of QBS.

To read the Federal Brooks Act, visit our website:
www.acec-co.org/qbs/resources/thebrooksactfederal.pdf

Colorado's mini-Brooks Bill can be found at:
www.acec-co.org/qbs/resources/co%20mini-brooks%20bill.pdf

QBS Colorado Directors

QBS Colorado is an organization formed by AIA/CO, ACEC/CO, and Professional Engineers of Colorado to be an advocate for qualifications-based selection of professional services. "The mission of QBS Colorado is to promote quality and value in professional design services in the construction industry. We believe that a professional and constructive relationship between the government client and design professional is paramount to ensuring team spirit, quality services, and a public building that is a credit to your organization and the citizens you serve."

QBS best serves the interest of the public who expect value and minimum operational and lifecycle costs for their tax dollar expended on public works and buildings.

AIA/CO:

Joonho Yo 720.540.6800
vacant
vacant

ACEC/CO:

Tracy Lyman (Chair) 303.534.1100
Dan Akin (Vice Chair) 303.858.0404
Ceila Rethamel 720.963.4361

NSPE-CO (formerly PEC):

Paul Bakken 303.378.4341
Mike Fink 719.322.2088

CAGE:

Andy Garner 303.420.4699

QBS/CO Coordinator: Sue Bertram 303.722.4664

Sponsoring Organization

Administrative Directors:

ACEC/CO: Marilen Reimer 303.832.2200
AIA/CO: Sonia Riggs 303.446.2266
NSPE-CO: Erin Johnson 303.480.1160
CAGE: Becky Roland 303.551.3266

QBS Colorado
800 Grant Street, Suite 100
Denver, Colorado 80203
303.832.2200
Fax 303.832.0400
qbsco@acec-co.org
www.acec-co.org/qbs