

This document provides guidance on using a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) process for procuring engineering or architectural professional services contracts that will be funded in whole or in part by South Carolina Infrastructure Investment Program (SCIIP) or state matching grant funds from the South Carolina Rural Infrastructure Authority (RIA).

If other funding sources for the contract(s) to be procured have specific procurement requirements, the most stringent requirements should be used. If the cost of the contract is conservatively estimated to be less than \$250,000 to fully complete the project (i.e., planning, design, construction oversight, final plans, etc.), contact the RIA grant manager about the possibility of using an Informal Procurement Method (see SCIIP Project Management Procedures). This guidance should be used in conjunction with any local laws, regulations or policies that govern the procurement of engineering services using an RFQ process. The most stringent applicable requirements should be used. If you have questions about this guidance, please contact the RIA grant manager.

An RFQ process to procure engineering services is consistent with 2 CFR 200.320. The South Carolina Office of the State Engineer (OSE) process for procuring professional services has been used as a guide for this RFQ process. The OSE process can be found in Chapter 4 of the OSE Manual for Planning and Execution of State Permanent Improvements. Chapter 4 describes the process for state agencies to procure professional services and includes oversight by OSE. Because SCIIP Grantees are not state agencies, the forms and OSE oversight steps required by Chapter 4 do not apply to Grantees. However, Grantees may find some forms listed in Chapter 4 useful for their RFQ process.

## **I. RFQ Selection Plan**

1. Designate an RFQ review team to develop an RFQ Selection Plan which will be used to request and evaluate the responses from prospective offerors. The Selection Plan is an internal document and should not be shared with prospective offerors. The Selection Plan should include the following:
  - a. A list of the members of the RFQ review team along with each member's qualification and an explanation of their role in this process. The review team should include at least three members and have an odd number of members. Members should be qualified to prepare the RFQ Document (described below) and to review the Statement of Qualifications submitted by offerors in response to the RFQ.
  - b. A list of evaluation factors, along with a detailed explanation/description of each evaluation factor, and the numeric "weighting" or relative importance of each factor used in evaluating

each offeror. **Price is not an evaluation factor in an RFQ.** Typical evaluation factors include:

- Qualifications of firm and proposed project team
- Experience with similar projects by firm and proposed project team
- Past performance/reference checks
- Current/future workload
- Location of the proposed project team
- Past work with Grantee

c. The evaluation standards defining the minimum acceptable requirements for each evaluation factor. The evaluation standards serve as a measurement guide for the RFQ review team to determine whether or not an offeror meets the minimum requirements.

2. Develop an RFQ file to document the RFQ process.
3. Develop an RFQ Document for prospective offerors (see additional details in section II, RFQ Document).

## II. RFQ Document

RIA has developed a sample RFQ document that Grantees may use, which can be found at <https://ria.sc.gov/resources/forms-documents/>. At a minimum, the RFQ document should:

1. Contain a general scope of work, a description of all professional services required for the project, the anticipated project delivery method and implementation schedule, the RFQ submission deadline, and how interested firms can apply for consideration and obtain additional information or ask questions.
2. Include the applicable Terms and Conditions for Federal Contracts from the SCIIP Project Management Procedures that must be incorporated in the contract for the selected offeror.
3. List all evaluation factors, along with an explanation/description of each evaluation factor, and their relative importance.
4. Advise prospective offerors on how to organize their Statements of Qualifications and list any items that should be included such as, information about the firm, resumes of key personnel that will work on the project, examples of similar work, references, and other information relevant to the RFQ evaluation factors.

If required by the special conditions on the SCIIP grant, the draft RFQ should be submitted to RIA for review prior to advertisement.

### III. Advertising

Projects must be advertised for a minimum of fifteen (15) days; however, a 30-day advertisement period is recommended in order to provide sufficient time to obtain an adequate number of responses. The advertisement should include:

1. A complete statement of the work to be performed.
2. A statement explaining how and where to obtain the RFQ Document, a complete SCIIP application, and other relevant documents such as PERs, plans, specifications, etc.
3. The advertisement should clearly state that the offeror shall submit Statements of Qualifications addressing the requirements in the RFQ Document.
4. The deadline and place for their submittal and a contact (name, phone number, email address) for additional information or questions.
5. At a minimum, RIA expects the RFQ to be advertised in the South Carolina Business Opportunities (SCBO) and for the Grantee to directly solicit to at least three qualified engineering firms. Also, the Grantee should take appropriate affirmative actions to solicit Disadvantage Business Enterprises (see SCIIP Project Management Procedures). The following South Carolina state agencies maintain lists that may be useful in identifying Disadvantaged Business Enterprises that may be qualified:
  - a. South Carolina Department of Transportation: <http://dbwappsp.scdot.org/dbesearch/>
  - b. South Carolina Division of Small and Minority Business Contracting and Certification: <https://smbcc.sc.gov/directory.html>
6. If desired, the Grantee may hold a pre-submittal conference to allow prospective offerors to ask questions. This should be detailed in the RFP document and attendance should be optional. Any information shared at the conference should be posted online as an addendum to the RFP.

### IV. Evaluation of Qualifications

The RFQ review team should ensure compliance with the following during the evaluation process:

1. The Statements of Qualifications submitted in response to the RFQ must be evaluated using only the evaluation factors standards outlined in the RFQ Selection Plan and RFQ Document. No other factors or criteria should be used in the evaluation and there should be strict adherence to any weighting specified for each factor.

2. The Grantee must comply with the Freedom of Information Act; however, review team members must not disclose confidential information derived from proposals and negotiations submitted by competing Offerors during the selection process.
3. SCIP funds may not go to individuals or entities that are prohibited from doing business with the federal government. The debarment status of offerors should be checked on the System for Award Management (SAM) website at <https://www.sam.gov>.
4. All responsive offerors should be ranked in writing from most advantageous to least advantageous based on the evaluation factors. If two or more firms have the same rank, the Grantee should give preference to the DBE firm, if applicable; otherwise, the Grantee should give preference to the firm/project team located closest to the project location.
5. If noted in the RFQ document, the review team may decide to conduct interviews to determine the most advantageous engineering firm for their project. Interviews may be useful prior to the final selection to ensure that the engineering firm understands the project, allow the firm to discuss relevant qualifications, and give the review team the opportunity to ask questions. The following procedures should be followed if interviews are to be conducted:
  - a. Based on the ranking of offerors, the review team can develop a short list of the top firms to interview. If possible, the short list should consist of at least three firms.
  - b. Ten business days before the interview date, the review team should send written notice of the date and location for interviews to the short-listed firms.
  - c. All interviews should occur on the same day.
  - d. If the RFQ team will be interviewing the firms in various locations, the team should make sure that each location is similarly equipped and furnished.
  - e. Each voting member of the RFQ team must be present for each interview. Typically, only members of the RFQ team may be present during interviews, but the Grantee's procurement official may be present to observe the interview process.
  - f. The RFQ team must not discuss fees and compensation with the firms during the interviews.
  - g. Based on the Statement of Qualifications, interview responses and evaluation factors, the Grantee should re-rank the firms from most to least advantageous using the same evaluation factors identified in the RFQ.
6. The RFQ review team's written evaluation and selection documentation should be retained in the RFQ file. Exhibit A contains forms that may be used to document rankings.

## **V. Selection**

Once engineering firms are ranked from most to least advantageous, either with or without interviews:

1. The Grantee should notify offerors, in writing, of their qualification status. Written notice should be given to the name and address on the Statements of Qualifications and/or sent by email to the name and email address on the Statement of Qualifications.
2. The RFQ file should include, at a minimum, the following:
  - a. A copy of the RFQ Selection Plan.
  - b. Copy of the advertisement.
  - c. Brief description of solicitation process including firms contacted and efforts to get DBE participation.
  - d. A copy of the RFQ Document and any associated documents and addenda.
  - e. A copy of all Statements of Qualifications received including any modifications.
  - f. Written ranking of all offerors from most advantageous to least advantageous.
  - g. Written justification for rejecting an offeror, if applicable.
  - h. Any other documentation related to this RFQ process.

## **VI. Negotiating Engineering Services Contract**

1. The Grantee must negotiate with the firm with the highest ranking.
2. If the Grantee is unable to negotiate a contract with the highest ranked firm, the Grantee must provide the highest ranked firm with written notice of the termination of negotiations.
3. At that point, the Grantee can negotiate a contract with the second ranked firm. If the Grantee is unable to negotiate a contract with this firm as well, the Grantee may continue the process in the same manner until the Grantee is able to negotiate a contract.
4. At no time, however, should negotiations include more than one firm.
5. Successful contract negotiations require an exchange of information including the project scope, technical information, expected deliverables, reporting requirements, administrative requirements, project milestones/deadlines and budgetary goals.

6. The Grantee should obtain a description of the services and schedule the firm proposes to provide and determine if the proposed scope of services is adequate or excessive.
7. After exchanging information, the Grantee is in a position to negotiate what would be a fair and reasonable fee for the firm's services. The negotiation should consider any additional services that may be needed and reimbursable expenses.
8. The negotiations also should include a draft contract for engineering services provided by the selected firm. The contract should include a cost breakdown for key project tasks such as design, permitting, bidding, construction oversight and project completion, a schedule with key project milestones/deadlines, and the proposed terms and conditions. The contract must include the applicable Terms and Conditions for Federal Contracts from the SCIIP Project Management Procedures, which were also included in the RFQ Document.

## **VII. RIA Review and Final Contract for Engineering Services**

Following the successful negotiation of the contract and **prior to executing the contract**, the Grantee should submit the procurement documents and draft contract to the RIA grant manager for review. The RIA form titled "Professional Services Contract Submission Checklist" includes all required documents. Once the Grantee is notified by RIA of successful review of the documents, the Grantee and firm can execute the final contract.

## **VIII. Record Retention**

All documents related to the selection process as well as the executed contract shall be retained in accordance with the "Maintenance and Access to Records" section of the SCIIP Project Management Procedures.



# Exhibit A: Evaluation Forms

The following forms may be used by the selection committee to document individual and committee rankings of respondents:

1. Individual Review Sheet
2. Committee Summary Sheet

**PROFESSIONAL SERVICES EVALUATION – INDIVIDUAL REVIEW SHEET**

(To be used by each committee member to evaluate an RFP/RFQ)

OWNER: \_\_\_\_\_ (NAME)

PROJECT: \_\_\_\_\_ (NUMBER) \_\_\_\_\_ (NAME)

EVALUATION CRITERIA (Fill in from RFQ/RFP)	MAXIMUM POINTS	SCORES FOR EACH FIRM					
		A	B	C	D	E	F
a)							
b)							
c)							
d)							
e)							
f)							
g)							
h)							
i)							
<b>TOTAL</b> (Use to calculate average scores for committee summary sheet)							
<b>RANKING OF FIRMS (1,2,3,...)</b>							
<b>NOTES:</b>		<b>FIRM NAMES:</b>					
		A -					
		B -					
		C -					
		D -					
		E -					
		F -					

REVIEWER (PRINT OR TYPE NAME) \_\_\_\_\_ (DATE) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
(SIGNATURE)



**PROFESSIONAL SERVICES EVALUATION – COMMITTEE SUMMARY**

(To summarize the results of the Review Committee’s Selection for RFP or RFQ)

**OWNER:** \_\_\_\_\_  
(NAME)

**PROJECT:** \_\_\_\_\_  
(NUMBER) (NAME)

EVALUATION CRITERIA (Fill in from RFQ/RFP)	MAXIMUM POINTS	AVERAGE SCORES FOR EACH FIRM (Calculate from individual review sheets)					
		A	B	C	D	E	F
a)							
b)							
c)							
d)							
e)							
f)							
g)							
h)							
i)							
<b>TOTAL</b>							
<b>RANKING OF FIRMS (1,2,3,...)</b>							
<b>NOTES:</b>     	<b>FIRM NAMES:</b>						
	A -						
	B -						
	C -						
	D -						
	E -						
F -							

\_\_\_\_\_  
REVIEW PANEL CHAIR (PRINT OR TYPE NAME) (DATE)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(SIGNATURE)