

Qualification Based Selection -- a Better “Value”

It’s easy to understand that, when seeking a surgeon, you would not simply take bids then choose the low-bid surgeon to do your surgery. In procuring professional services it is recognized that qualifications and competence can be more important than cost in making the selection. An engineering consulting firm or individual provides professional services that are needed by virtually any public/private concern involved with developing sites for habitation, infrastructure (road, bridges, utilities, etc.), environmental cleanups, or building structures. Perhaps not as apparent as the surgeon analogy, qualifications and competence are key in procuring an engineering consultant, and a qualification based selection (QBS) process is encouraged and even mandated in most cases when public funds are involved.

By emphasizing qualifications in the procurement process, the true value of your consultant can be realized in many ways. A qualified consultant provides the best technical solution which stretches budgets, offers innovative ideas, provides quality designs that minimize costly change orders, has minimal learning curve expenses, and provides skilled responsiveness/management that can eliminate costly delays, to mention a few.

The services you seek from a consultant should be much broader than just pure technical/design efforts as well. When considering all of the various aspects that must come together to realize a successful development program, even a higher level of value can be realized from your consultant’s expertise and knowledge, including:

- Master Planning
- Capital Improvement Program Development
- Public Outreach and Vision Buy-In Services
- Field Surveys
- Agency Approval Attainment
- Public Inconvenience Mitigation
- Safety and Phasing Measures Determination
- Grant Administration/Project Closeout Services
- Needs Assessments
- Successful Funding Justification and Grant Procurement Assistance
- Environmental Assessments and Approval Attainment
- Zoning and Platting Services
- Permit Procurements
- Public Right-Of-Way Procurement
- Project Inspection/Management Services

A remarkable success story on how an engineering consultant has effectively been used is the Columbus Municipal Airport in Columbus, Indiana. This airport was formerly an Air Force Base acquired by the City in 1972 and has seen dramatic changes over the last 35 years. The airport has received over 40 state and federal grants for its airside planning and development amounting to over \$13 million in which much of this money required competing on a national level to obtain. The airport has state of the art navigational facilities including a full CAT I ILS primary runway, an FAA cost shared control tower, and 80 based aircraft including several large business jets. Its landside is fully integrated with the city’s comprehensive plan containing integrated trails, a National Guard Base, two college campuses, a nationally renowned Learning Center, a museum, and over 70 business tenants. Their airside engineering consultant, an aviation specialty firm, has been integrally included in all funding procurement efforts, capital improvement planning, master planning, environmental assessments, airside design, construction supervision, and grant administration. The consultant is on the agenda for all board meetings along with the Board Attorney, Fixed Base Operator, Farm Manager and management staff as a key participant in the airport’s vision and strategy. The Aviation Association of Indiana (AAI) published in its 2004 document that the Airport had an annual economic impact to the community of over \$50 million.

To learn more about working with Professional Consulting Engineering or using the QBS process, please call the American Council of Engineering Companies (ACEC Indiana) at (317) 637-3563 or go to www.acecindiana.org.