

# GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

## Office of Contracting and Procurement



### Architect and Engineering (A/E) Source Selection Process

#### Crossing the “Acceptable” Chasm

The District Department of Transportation (DDOT) has incorporated this document into their A/E debriefing packages to provide offerors additional insight and transparency into the evaluation process. Details related to each factor and Common Mistakes/Advice by A/E factor are discussed below. Keep in mind the details for these factors may vary by project (adding specifics), but they will maintain their intent.

The District evaluates A/E qualifications/proposals/interviews based on the evaluation criteria set forth in 27 DCMR 2620.5. A Firm’s rating and score is based upon a panel’s assessment of the merits and risks associated with your submission. Evaluations are first performed individually by each panel member. Then the panel meets to achieve consensus ratings/scores regarding each firm’s submission. At this level, evaluations are performed by evaluating your submission against the solicitation to include the SOW and evaluation criteria. The below definitions are used in assigning factor ratings:

- Unacceptable: Fails to meet minimum requirements; e.g., no demonstrated capacity, major deficiencies which are not correctable; Proposer did not address the factor.
- Poor: Marginally meets the minimum requirements; major deficiencies which may be correctable.
- Minimally Acceptable: Marginally meets minimum requirements; minor deficiencies which may be correctable.
- Acceptable: Meets requirements; no deficiencies.
- Good: Meets requirements and exceeds some requirements; no deficiencies.
- Excellent: Exceeds most, if not all requirements; no deficiencies.

Thereafter, the Contracting Officer (CO) makes the comparative analysis that considers the panel’s findings and recommended ranking as to the most highly qualified firm and may also include the CO’s own independent confirmation or assessment of the panel’s recommendation. Finally, the Contracting Officer makes the source selection decision.

As a result, offerors should ensure they address all evaluation criteria in their submission.

Factor 1 – What to Expect: “Professional qualifications necessary for satisfactory performance of required services including professional qualifications of Key Personnel.” Key personnel qualifications can be derived from education, certifications, trainings, licenses, and experience. (SF 330 Part I E)

Common Mistakes/Advice: The most common mistake made here is using a resume that is outdated and/or one that is not tailored specifically to the requirement. When developing the team’s qualifications, offerors should tailor each resume to the closest fit to the requirement. If not, the key personnel experience will not be relevant and possible points opportunities will be lost.

Factor 2 – What to Expect: “Specialized experience and technical competence in the types of work required.” This evaluation criterion seeks to evaluate the work itself by comparing the experience presented by the offeror in comparison to the scope of work for the solicited project. To receive higher scores, offerors should strive to match their experience to the solicitation requirement as closely as possible. This may be in terms of dollar magnitude, complexity, risks, challenges, level of coordination, or type of work. (SF 330 Part I F)

Common Mistakes/Advice: Unlike factors 1 and 3, offerors have less control over this factor because their firm experience is static until new projects are completed. Nonetheless, offerors should tailor their experience examples to the requirement as closely as possible. Furthermore, provide as many examples needed (subject to solicitation page count or other solicitation limitations) to cover your assessment of the requirement.

Factor 3 – What to Expect: “Capacity to accomplish the work in the required time” The goal should be to demonstrate the offeror’s understanding of the requirement such that sufficient personnel in terms of quantity and labor categories are proposed to successfully complete the project. (SF 330 Part I G and Part II)

Common Mistakes/Advice: Often, offerors fail to adequately demonstrate the capacity of the firm and/or key personnel due to the key personnel’s current involvement on other projects, or the firm’s ongoing project portfolio. Other times, it may be due to the scope of the project demanding a resource pool larger than the proposed team. Be certain to demonstrate that (despite all of the work a firm may present in terms of experience) the firm has sufficient capacity to also successfully staff (with high quality resources) and perform the proposed work.

Factor 4 – What to Expect: “Past Performance on contracts with Government agencies and private industry in terms of cost control, quality of work, and compliance with performance schedules.” Unlike Factor 2, this criterion evaluates the administration of the work. Therefore, offerors should demonstrate how, when performing the relevant work experience, they were able

to maintain acceptable quality, adhere to a schedule, and monitor and control costs. (SF 330 Part I F)

*Common Mistakes/Advice:* Many offerors miss addressing the specifics of Factor 4. They assume their experience descriptions will cover this factor, but often, they do not. This oftentimes results in a less than Acceptable rating because evaluators are unable to assess these specific factors in the submission according to the criteria.

The District may also include additional evaluation criteria applicable to any requirement. In considering the above information, we will now discuss considerations in achieving a desired score.

### **The “Acceptable” Standard:**

First, an Acceptable rating is not poor. It means the District believes your firm has adequate resources and skills to perform the work. To achieve this, offerors should always address the SOW requirements, applicable instructions to offerors, and all evaluation criteria as defined in the solicitation. In addition, the offeror must provide sufficient evidence to convince the District the offeror possesses adequate resources and skills to perform the project. If not, they risk their submission being found less than acceptable and thus rated/scored lower because inadequate information was provided to be evaluated. This standard varies with the requirement, and the pool of firms competing for the requirement. When offerors address these items, their chances of at least being determined “Acceptable” are greatly increased. However, this does not mean your firm will be deemed Most Highly Qualified to complete the work and ultimately selected.

### **The above Acceptable standard:**

In order to achieve a score above an Acceptable, offerors must demonstrate how their qualifications exceed at least some if not all of the requirements. This means that for any given project, the offerors should strive to exceed the minimum set of perceived or actual qualifications stated necessary to complete the project. Throughout, there must be a clear benefit to the District. This may include:

1. Reducing risk to performance, quality, schedule, or cost overrun; and
2. Incorporating details that are likely to increase the District’s confidence in offerors ability to perform successfully.

In addition, the following questions may be considered in improving your rating and score:

1. Did you adequately and clearly address all requirements and evaluation criteria?
2. Did you analyze the project, looking for risks/mitigations or benefits applicable to the District? If so, are those clearly stated in your submission?
3. Did you tailor all resumes specifically to the requirements?

4. Did you tailor your firm's experience to match (as close as possible) the parameters of the requirement being solicited?
5. Did you select a team that precisely matches the needs of the requirement?

What form this takes depends on the requirement and the evaluation criteria. The below examples are provided as examples of how a firm may cross the Acceptable chasm. They do not represent a guarantee from the District regarding future ratings. Rather, they represent aspects of qualifications the District may consider when evaluating firms.

*Factor 1:* A firm may achieve a higher rating by proposing personnel with qualifications greater than those required for the position. Keep in mind, the additional qualifications must be relevant to the requirement, and the extent of value given may depend on how prevalent personnel exceed the requirement.

*Factor 2:* A firm may achieve a higher rating by providing experience examples that are greater than the requirement in terms of complexity or magnitude. Furthermore, when many of those individuals that performed the relevant experience are proposed and available to perform the current requirement.

*Factor 3:* A firm may achieve a higher rating by demonstrating:

- 1) How your firm is staffed to overcome actual or perceived capacity challenges that may arise during performance, and
- 2) Precise traceability between proposed personnel and the duties they will perform on the current requirement.

*Factor 4:* A firm may achieve a higher rating by describing challenges encountered during performance with a relevant risk to quality, schedule, and/or cost, and how they managed the risk and outcome of the project.

Please note, all instances involve demonstrating how your firm's qualifications exceed those required by the requirement.

As stewards of District and federal funds, it is the District's goal to provide a fair, objective, and transparent evaluation process that fosters competition in contracting. We hope that you will consider this information in your pursuit of future District opportunities. If you have any questions, please contact the undersigned.

Very Respectfully,

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