

Choose Wisely

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HURRY! Time's a wastin'. You've got to put together a project before all that "free" stimulus money is gone! Come on. Get an engineer. Get some plans. Fill out a few forms. Hurry.

STOP!!! Take a breath. Take two. They're free. That's about all that is. Let's face it. It's going to cost money to develop a project. Ultimately, you want a project that meets your needs first, your wants second, as well as one that is affordable and fundable. Choosing the right engineering firm is, in my opinion, the second most important factor in developing a project. I'm going to attempt to assist you in choosing the right firm. I say attempt since ultimately it's up to you, the municipality, to decide. I am merely giving you some guidelines, some suggestions, to consider when choosing an engineering firm.

Whether you know you have a project you want to develop or someone comes knocking at your door saying, "let us find you the money and develop a project", remember one thing, shop around. You shop around for the best price on a new car, insurance or even groceries. The same applies to engineering firms. The firm you have been dealing with for the past hundred years may, or may not, have your best interests at heart. The firm that comes knocking at your door may have a proposal too good to pass up. You won't know unless you have something to compare them to. There are basically two ways to go about comparing proposals. You can issue the request for proposal (RFP) or you can solicit selected firms to submit proposals. Let's do the second one first, just to keep it interesting.

Soliciting Proposals from Selected Firms

I underlined and used bold type to catch your attention. This is a good way to compare proposals from firms you are familiar or comfortable with. I suggest contacting a minimum of three firms for proposals. Unfortunately, unless you provide each firm with a scope of work to be performed, you may not be comparing apples to apples (I hate that analogy, just like the others I may/will use, but they do illustrate the point). Unless all firms were given the same guidelines or desired scope of work, you don't have a level playing field (ok, I'll stop already). You may get proposals that barely cover the basics to ones that far exceed what you had in mind. This may affect the contract negotiations stage as items on

both sides are either added or taken out of the proposal. A bit more work for all involved, but still a good way to receive and evaluate proposals if you don't want to issue or don't have the time for a formal request for proposal.

Request for Proposal (RFP)

This is a more formal way of soliciting proposals. It usually (or SHOULD) involve the formation of an RFP committee consisting of elected officials, TREATMENT PLANT STAFF, New York Rural Water Association (NYRWA) and representatives from the funding agencies. The purpose of the committee is to develop a request for proposal that is specific in describing the scope of work being requested. This levels the playing field (sorry, last time) by giving all those submitting proposals the same requirements. It also makes the selection process a bit easier because you can cull those proposals that go outside the stated scope and concentrate on the ones that followed directions. Contract negotiations are easier since the quoted price is for the requested work only. Very little wiggle room. This is, in my opinion, the better way to solicit proposals if you have time. The time frame is a bit longer since you are dealing with a committee (schedules, availability of members) and you are sending the RFP to a larger pool of engineering firms. In the end though it is worth the extra effort.

Regardless of which way you choose, there are a few very important things to remember when evaluating the proposals. Cheaper is not better. Nor is the most expensive proposal. Price should be the last thing you look at. What is important is experience with systems similar to yours. CHECK the REFERENCES! And not only the mayors or supervisors that are listed. Contact the operators that are charged with running what the engineer proposed, designed and built. And finally, value the input of your treatment plant staff. They are the ones that will have to work with the final product.

If you are considering a project in the near future, please give me a call at (518) 828-3155 x18. We can work with you to achieve your goal of a project that meets your needs and wants, and that is affordable and fundable. Oh, yeah. The most important factor, in my opinion, in developing a project, listen to your operators and involve them right from the beginning. 💧