

# QUALIFICATIONS-BASED SELECTION

## Quality, innovation and success in community projects

By Troy Clay

Breaking ground on a new municipal building, infrastructure, school or any number of what are often highly scrutinized projects is both exciting and of course has its challenges. Every day I am reminded of my responsibilities as I focus on the five major projects I have either in the plan, design or construction stage, just like my colleagues across Michigan.

Though each of us has our own style of oversight, planning and proverbial techniques or “gut” approaches, there is one thing I suggest that all my colleagues do, and that is to implement a Qualifications-Based Selection (QBS) system. As both facilitator and practitioner of QBS, I practice what I preach.

QBS has major benefits to a community project:

- It results in a high-quality project; it substantially reduces the risk of project failure;
- It gives you a wide-range of advice and options through the trusted advisor relationship with consulting engineers, architects or other professionals; and
- It brings long-term efficiency to the built project’s operation and maintenance costs.

Qualifications-Based Selection is an objective, flexible procedure for obtaining architectural, engineering, surveying and other related professional services on public projects. It is straightforward, easy to implement, objective and fair, and open to audit.

### Project quality

The essence of QBS is value-focused planning and design to

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help you define your project and how you want to build it.

The public library in Southfield, Michigan is a beautifully constructed facility that is a joy to visit and a fine example of planning and design through the QBS process. Librarian Douglas Zyskowski was intrigued by the notion of not necessarily going out for low bid. “This was a custom project. It was going to be totally unique. We needed a very strong relationship with all of the players in this project, from the architect to the construction firm to the various contractors. We knew we could achieve that better using the QBS process than with the traditional low-bid process.”

Bruce Kuffer, a Michigan QBS Coalition board member, has worked with many municipal clients as business development manager for Fishbeck, Thompson, Carr and Huber. “Value has many factors. You need to look not only at price, but what is the quality you want? What is the specific item you want? Do you have a critical deadline?”

Decisions based on price alone exclude many other important factors that bring quality and long term viability to a project. This is the case with low-bid of consulting engineers, architects and other design professionals.

When low-bid becomes the single deciding factor, the quality of the project is compromised. Per-

haps only months or even years later, as the built project runs into failure issues, does the client realize that their new headaches might have been totally avoidable early on in the process.

### Security

“Most newly elected officials don’t have a large construction background. They don’t understand the financing and engineering and all the things that go into a project; nor would they be expected to; the general population doesn’t,” says James S. Bain, Indiana QBS Facilitator.

“QBS is a terrific process to hire professional advisors – trusted advisors to local officials sort out the design, engineering and architecture needs of any project a community might be building. It helps a community steer clear of the biggest risk of going with the lowest bidder, the risk of failure. Any time you design something improperly or inadequately, it won’t last as long or it may fail in terms of its viability.”

Looking over the life cycle of a project, less than one percent of the cost involves the architects, engineers and design portion of the project. Wise choices during that initial stage of the project add value to the remaining 99 percent of the expenditure, the construction and long-term maintenance of the project.

QBS then is essential to an elected official who might not otherwise know all of the things that are necessary and who needs all options presented at the planning outset.

## Trust

“Projects come and go, but trusted advisors are there for the long haul,” says Donald E. Lund, president of Tetra Tech MPS. “That’s what community leaders should look for when they’re hiring their consulting engineer. When a community is working with a consultant and they have a long-term relationship, the community’s interests are protected because the professional learns the community’s values and expectations.”

The hired professional should think about the long-term interests of the customer, for example: energy costs, long-term construction durability, the types of materials selected, pump system versus gravity, concrete versus asphalt, fitting the project into the community’s overall vision, and so on.

A city manager’s career will include years of experience with planning, design and construction of municipal projects. William M. Costick, retired city manager of Farmington Hills, Michigan and now director of community rela-

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tions for Orchard Hiltz & McCliment, Inc. says “Tenure is a very important factor. If you’ve been in a community you get to know the people. You get to know the goals and objectives for that community. You get to know how that community wishes to treat its citizens and wishes to plan projects. When engineers come and go and change frequently, that continuity just doesn’t exist.”

Longer-term relationships with professionals often result in advice on a lot of other issues, often unrelated to the original design project. Costick says “When I was city manager I wanted to get the best advice possible. If you take low bids for those kinds of professional

services you are going to be limited in what kind of advice you’re going to get. It’s true, ‘you get what you pay for.’”

Gaining engineering, consulting or architectural assistance by low bid will result in an inferior project more often than not.

Trusted advisor relationships give alternatives and ensure we make the most intelligent decisions. We can put this in perspective using a medical analogy.

You go to the doctor and find that you must have surgery. Do you pick the doctor who is the least expensive, or do you look for the doctor who is most qualified to perform the operation?

In addition, if you have a doctor that you see consistently, he gets to know you better and can provide prevention options that enhance your quality of health. Why would you design a building, plan a community or install infrastructure – all major community investments, without considering, first and foremost, your team’s qualifications?

## Starting your own QBS system

Call us. The Michigan QBS Coalition can consult with you over the phone, facilitate QBS planning and help you draft a QBS system catered to the unique nature of your community at no charge.

For more information on QBS, please call Ron Brenke at the QBS Coalition office at 517-332-2066 or visit the QBS website at [www.QBS-MI.org](http://www.QBS-MI.org). ♦

### QBS supporters:

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