1.0 Introduction

The objective of this guidance is to provide a framework for our internal customers when it is necessary to develop a request for proposal to procure assistance from the firms approved under the Office of Environmental Quality's facilitation contracts.

2.0 Request for proposal

2.1 General

This section of the document provides guidance and instructions for the preparation of performance-based request for proposal. The purpose of the request for proposal is to detail the work requirements for projects and programs that have deliverables and/or services performed. It is our goal that all projects focus on outcomes and results as well as methods of performance and processes. We want to give our firms more latitude for determining methods of performance with more responsibility for performance quality. By assuming the responsibility for meeting performance requirements, the firms will seek innovations to efficiently and effectively achieve performance objectives. It is our hope that the use of performance-based standards and specifications will lead to more cost-effective and higher value interventions.

Because the request for proposal is the most essential document in the contract management process, it must be written so that technical and non-technical readers can understand the requirements and needs of the requestors. The initial investment of time and effort to write a clear, concise, and realistic request for proposal will:

- Allow the firms to accurately cost their proposals,
- Provide a baseline for the development of other parts of the request, particularly the evaluation criteria,
- Minimize the need for change orders and supplemental agreements with the Statement of Work (which can delay delivery and increase the cost of the project),
- Allow the Department and the firm to assess performance, and
- Reduce claims and disputes under the contract.

2.2 Format

A. Project Request

This is a formal statement of need that is addressed to the appropriate firms approved under the Office of Environmental Quality's facilitation contracts on December 4, 2003. The statement contains a brief discussion of what is being requested, i.e., process improvement facilitation, assistance with conflict resolution, community and stakeholder involvement, etc., and the initiating authority for the project. This information should be sufficient enough for interested firms to determine whether or not they are able or wish to offer a proposal.

This section also identifies the title of the project. This title should be short but descriptive enough to distinguish it from other projects or tasks.

B. Background

This section contains a description of the chronology of events leading up to the request for services including prior intervention successes or failures. The background should include enough information, either directly or in the form of readily available reference materials, to fully disclose and clarify the problem and permit the firm to formulate an approach for achieving the objectives of the project.

This section will also describe the business units impacted by the request, including the mission(s) of the unit(s), the units' deliverables, and their customers.

It should also describe any perceived or potential constraints, boundaries, risks, and/or assumptions.

C. Description of Effort

While refraining from specifying "how" the work will be accomplished, this section provides a high level definition of the work to be performed by the consultant. It should contain a specific and clear statement of the problem, a description of the symptoms of the problem or opportunity, and the criteria for measuring the output of the current and resultant process or system.

Although not recommended, it may contain the initial thinking of the author on the basic methodology for accomplishing the task presented. For example, the author will state whether or not the consultant should convene a team of participants, if the consultant should act in an expert capacity and provide recommendations after the completion of a research project, or any other appropriate combination. If it has been determined that a team is the most effective approach for addressing the problem, detail the size of the project team, the participants' levels and positions within the organization, and the type of team, i.e., intact, cross-functional, or interagency team.

In order to provide the depth of information detailed in the previous statement, some preliminary scoping must be accomplished prior to the preparation of the request for proposal. See the Scoping Document attached as Appendix A. Although the preparation of the Scoping Document is not required, it is highly recommended as this template has proven to be extremely helpful when gathering information during the discovery process.

Clear articulation of the information in this section allows the firm to estimate the probable cost of the project and determine the levels of expertise, manpower, and other resources needed to accomplish the task.

This section also outlines any dependencies that may impact timely delivery.

D. Project Deliverables and Timeline

This section defines the deliverables that will require review and acceptance. Deliverables are detailed, step-by-step descriptions of the work products to be delivered by the consultant, possibly organized to reflect the suggested order in which work should be done.

Deliverables may include draft and final reports, policy and procedure manuals, process maps, meeting minutes, progress reports, presentation materials, or anything else that represents an acceptable interim or final product. The deliverable should be expressed in terms of results or outcomes, with criteria for verifying compliance. An acceptable deliverable is measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-constrained.

To develop deliverables, identify the major task headings and subtasks for performing the work. Describe each task as carefully and with as much detail as possible. Each task should be described in a separate, numbered paragraph, and there should be a deliverable product or measurable standard for each task.

Be sure to provide a realistic delivery schedule for project milestones. Schedules that are unnecessarily short or difficult to attain tend to restrict competition and result in higher prices.

E. Cost Restraints (if present)

This section details any cost limitations that may be have been placed upon the project. It is important that the Department create a realistic budget for the project and consider the key factors that will influence the consultants' estimates. They include:

- background material that must be digested
- need for convening assessments or process design
- anticipated number of stakeholder and participant meetings
- anticipated number of participants in the meeting (s)

- duration of the process
- travel expenses
- materials
- overhead
- other direct costs

F. Evaluation Criteria

The request for proposal must state in general terms all of the evaluation factors and their relative importance. If cost is a factor, include cost in the evaluation list with all other factors. Points assigned to each criterion should be included in this section of the request for proposal.

G. Submission Information

This section provides instructions to the firms such as closing date, question and answer procedures, number of copies required, number of pages, page setup information, submission guidelines, contact person, etc.

If a presentation from the firm is expected, explain in detail the format, time, and any other relevant information the firm would need to know in order to prepare a presentation.

Additionally, this is the section that should contain information on the Department's plan to present the request for proposal to the firm.

3.0 Presentation of the Request for proposal

After the request for proposal is complete, it must be presented to the firms. There are two preferred methods for presenting the information, which includes a formal presentation to all firms at once, or simply providing a hardcopy of the document with provisions for a question and answer period. Regardless of the presentation method chosen, be sure to inform the consultant by adding a statement in the *Submission Information* section of the request for proposal.

3.1 Formal Presentation

The formal presentation of the request for proposal is a structured meeting hosted by the Committee Chairperson in which all consultants that are invited to submit proposals are present. Understanding that all consultants are not local, adjustments may be made for the consultant through the use of teleconferencing or videoconferencing.

Educational Note: *When and How to Use Videoconferencing (an excerpt from "How to Make the Most of Technology Assisted Meetings" by Jana Markowitz)*

In general, groups who have worked together before get the best results from computer-mediated communications, including videoconferencing. While meeting participants can *see, hear, and interact with each other via videoconferencing, do not mistake videoconferencing as the equivalent of face-to-face meetings. Groups of strangers meeting initially via videoconference will have a difficult time getting acquainted, will often miscommunicate and offend each other, and do not generally bond as a team.*

If geographically dispersed teams need to meet via videoconference, be sure the meeting process and topics are carefully planned and explained to all participants well in advance of the meeting. Limit the number of participants to those needing to actively take part in the meeting. Having many silent onlookers is detrimental to the videoconferencing process. Use physical props (objects) and graphics to illustrate your ideas-the maxim that "a picture is worth a thousand words" is the reason you are having a videoconference rather than a telephone conference.

It is advisable to send out documents, spreadsheets, charts, and other materials in advance to support the meeting activities. ... If possible, agree on formalized signals for common needs such as questions, turn-taking, closing a topic, and so forth. In other words, what does a person do for permission to speak? Raise his hand? Clear her throat? Say the facilitator's name? "Just jumping in" really does not work and can leave participants frustrated when they cannot get a word in edgewise.

The formal presentation, which will vary in degree of formality, ensures all consultants are allowed the opportunity to hear an explanation of the organization's needs and ask any clarifying questions that may arise. This meeting may occur in any environment that is conducive to open conversation and honest exchange of ideas, and accessible to all participants.

This presentation method also eliminates the need to provide a question and answer period and an information dissemination plan that allows access for all consultants to see the questions asked and the answers provided to other consultants. However, adequate preparation time should be provided prior to the formal presentation by presenting the request for proposal to each consultant at least one week in advance of the presentation.

<u>Suggested Wording:</u> A (mandatory/optional) request for proposal presentation is scheduled at (place and time) on (date) as identified in the coverletter. Each firm may send a maximum of two representatives.

Specific questions concerning the request for proposal may be submitted to (contact person) prior to the presentation. Additional questions may be entertained at the presentation; however, responses may be deferred and answered at a later date. Oral responses by the Department prior to the presentation are considered tentative, and will be re-addressed at the presentation for all participants.

3.2 Traditional Distribution

When using traditional distribution to solicit proposals, the organization sends the request for proposal (and all supporting documentation) to the consultant through one of the many ground delivery modes. The organization should allow adequate time for delivery and review of the materials by the consultant when setting a "Respond by:" date.

Additionally, the organization must provide a question and answer period, and ensure all questions and answers are made available to all consultants. This question and answer period should be at least one week in duration, with provisions made for mail time. After the question and answer period has closed, a written synopsis of the questions asked and answers provided must be made available to all firms. The Task Order Manager may consider mailing a copy to all firms and/or placing the document on a website and providing the address to all firms.

4.0 Evaluating Proposals and Selecting Firms

The two major elements that must be present to ensure fair and equitable selection of firms are unbiased evaluators and consistently applied criteria.

A committee to select the consultant should be established and consist of the Committee Chairperson and at least two other members with experience in the type of service to be contracted. Remember to include members of the various stakeholder groups that will be impacted by or benefiting from the service, i.e., Department of Environment and Natural Resources, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, etc. When federal funds are used, in whole or part, as compensation for solicited services, a representative from the Federal Highway Administration should be invited to participate in the selection. Additionally, the DBE/Title VI Coordinator may be asked to sit with the Selection Committee on projects that may have DBE or Title VI effects. The level of participation, e.g., voting or non-voting, for the FHWA representative and the DBE/Title VI Coordinator is determined by the Committee Chairperson.

All firms approved under the Office of Environmental Quality's contracts are qualified to perform various types of facilitation. Check the website or contact the office to obtain an accurate listing of the firm(s) that are approved to provide the type(s) of facilitation required for your project.

To ensure each firm is afforded an equal opportunity to be selected, a Rating Worksheet should be used. This worksheet should be modified to address the important, value-added aspects of the project, and applied consistently to all firms. Following is an example of a rating worksheet that may be used.

Rating Worksheet			
Firm: ____________		Total Score: ________	
Project Name: ____________		Ranking: ________	
Total (Weight x Rating)	***Evaluation Area***	***Rating (# of points)***	***Weight***
	Firm's Expertise and Experience		
	▪ Experience integrating services and customers ▪ Connection of response to organizational goals ▪ Project administration and management background ▪ Organizational stability ▪ Key staff in proposed design are qualified to achieve outcomes ▪ Roles and responsibilities of key personnel are clear and appropriate ▪ Prior performance demonstrates high potential for success		
	Project Design /Approach		
	▪ Services are articulated and incorporate assessment at each stage ▪ Proposed strategy demonstrates focused methodology that leads to accomplishment of project goals ▪ Need for implementation support is recognized and included in proposal		
	Project Outcomes / Deliverables		
	▪ Clear description of program deliverables and how they add value to the short and long term success of the organization ▪ Expected results are clearly articulated ▪ Outcomes are realistic and measurable ▪ Evaluation plan to track performance is rational		
	Budget Proposal		
	▪ Budget and costs are rational and supported by proposed outcomes ▪ A difference exists in the hourly fee amount that is charged for preparation time and contact/delivery time ▪ A difference exists in the hourly fee charged based on the type of service rendered, e.g., process improvement vs. change management		

The Selection Committee should use this form, modified to address the needs of the project, to evaluate the firms ability to successfully meet the requirements outlined in the request for proposal. The Selection Committee should compare each firm to the predetermined criteria on the Rating Worksheet--not one firm against the other. Using a comparison to criteria will make the explanation to the firm(s) that is not selected objective, while simultaneously providing an educational opportunity that may increase their competitiveness on future projects.

The Selection Committee should rank the firms in order of preference using the scores obtained on the worksheet and the results of the ensuing discussion. With the understanding that consensus is not synonymous with agreement, the Committee should reach consensus on the ranking prior to concluding the meeting.

Educational Note*: According to the* Team Handbook*(1996, Joiner Associates), a decision by consensus is a decision in which all the group members find a common ground. Getting consensus* does not *mean that everyone must be completely satisfied with the outcome, or even that it is anyone's first choice.*

Consensus does not *mean:*
- *A unanimous vote*
- *Everyone getting everything they want*
- *Everyone finally coming around to the "right" opinion*

Consensus does *mean:*
- *Everyone understands the decision and can explain why it is best*
- *Everyone can live with the decision*

Consensus requires:
- *Time*
- *Active participation*
- *Skills in communication, listening, conflict resolution, and facilitation*
- *Creative thinking and open-mindedness*

Consensus decision-making is not just a way to reach a compromise. It is a search for the best decision through the exploration of the best of everyone's thinking.

Although all members may not completely agree with the decision, all should be able to support the decision and clearly articulate why the decision was best for this particular project.

Documentation of the proceedings should be provided to the Contract Manager for inclusion in the project file.

5.0 Notification Protocols and Task Order Management

For consistent communication of information, the Contract Manager will notify all firms and communicate the Selection Committee's decision. The Contract Manager may provide any information to the firm that is deemed helpful and constructive. Detailed budget information will not be disclosed; however, the number of hours proposed, the mix of personnel classifications, and total budget may be shared with interested stakeholders.

Additionally, the Contract Manager, who is responsible for ensuring performance of the contract and safeguarding the interest of the Department, will:

- Assist the Task Order Manager in preparing the request for proposal to ensure contractual provisions are addressed;
- Review invoices submitted to ensure the percentage of monies requested are consistent with the percentage of work completed; and
- Protect the integrity of the process by ensuring all firms are given equal access to information. Generally draft Requests for Proposals and one-on-one discussions between the Department and the firms improve the acquisition process; however, any information that could give any firm a competitive advantage must be made available to all firms.

The Task Order Manager is the primary point of contact for information about the project. This individual is familiar with the technical and organizational requirements of the project and is responsible for:

- Working with the consultant to plan the project, and establish a delivery schedule with appropriate milestones and delivery dates;
- Maintaining open lines of communication with the consultant to ensure the project is progressing as planned;
- Selecting a competent team (when team process is utilized), with a leader who is experienced in the context of the problem being addressed;
- Evaluating the quality of the product and recommending payment decisions to the Contract Manager.

Although everyone involved in the process has specific responsibilities, we must remember that if we are to achieve the highest level of success possible, we must always work together as a team.

Appendix A. Scoping Document

Process Information	
Process Name:	
Process Mission/Purpose:	
Process Owner:	
Key Issues:	
Input(s):	
First Step:	
Interim Steps:	
Last Step:	
Decision Point(s):	
Output(s):	

Customer Information		
Customer Type: *Circle One*	Customer	Product or Service
Internal External		
Internal External		
Internal External		
Internal External		
Internal External		

Workshop Information		
Workshop Purpose:		
Date and Location:		
Authorizing Sponsor(s):		
Reinforcing Sponsor(s):		
Sponsor Expectations		
Team Information		
Team Leader 1:		
Team Leader 2:		
Team Members:	Name	Unit/Organization
Expert Participants:		