

Finding the Right Fit

What should clients include in their Request for Proposals to help them get the most accurate responses?



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The more information provided to service firms up front, the easier it will be for clients to measure their understanding and knowledge of the tasks required and determine who is best suited to perform those tasks. While it is imperative that as much information as possible be included in an RFP, it is usually understood that, due to confidentiality issues or lack of data, all the pertinent facts may not be available. This is when the quality and expertise of the service provider becomes invaluable. Experience, knowledge and the ability to find and discern information needed to construct an honest, forthright and accurate RFP response is where service providers must excel.

Ideally, a right of way firm would like to have an understanding of the client's acquisition/project execution philosophy. How many landowner meetings do they require to negotiate before involving legal counsel? Do they require lien, mortgage and easement information in their title research documentation? Are survey permissions to be acquired by phone or in writing? What are the permitting requirements? What type of reporting is expected? All of these factors and more will impact the deliverables and the estimated costs associated.

At a minimum, the RFP should describe the length, beginning and end points if the project is linear or the amount of acreage to be researched or acquired for lease, fee or mineral acquisitions. It should include an exact number of tracts (or best estimation), the required extent of title research, a basic timeline for completion, whether or not the client has the right of eminent domain with the ultimate authority to condemn and any other specific details deemed to be pertinent to the project.

Service providers should take the initiative and supply personnel resumes to showcase their experience, professional credentials and expertise with previous similar projects. At Mustang, we discuss our People Oriented...Project Driven® culture that attracts excellent personnel and has very low attrition. For the client, that means a consistency of professionals who have the necessary experience and who will be part of the project from start to completion. We convey that, as a full-service engineering company, we can provide all engineering and field services required for a complete project, reducing friction among contractors and helping to assure a smoother job with no surprises.



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Clarity of scope and project deliverables is fundamental to a consultant's ability to meet the client's expectations in a proposal - and ultimately on the job.

The best scope of work is one that is short and sweet. It should include project deliverables, details about project timing and delivery deadlines, and agency expectations about quality and quantity of work. Less focus on page count, font size and more focus on the actual skills within our profession will give clients a superior project result.

I recently experienced a lost opportunity, according to a debriefing that explained why the contract was awarded to another company. The RFP called for providing a three-page work sample. During the pre-bid meeting, several consultants asked for clarification on this requirement. "A three-page sample of your work" was the reply. Yet, during my debriefing, I was advised that, while my work sample was excellent, the firm that scored the highest points had provided three different one-page samples. Three one-page samples? I pointed out the specific RFP text and questions from the pre-bid. The feedback was still the same, "You missed a substantial opportunity for points."

There will certainly be more clarifying questions in my future. Excellent examples of our work do not always equate to attaining more points during the RFP process. Yet, I would need to fire up my calculator to track the number of clarifying questions we should ask as we try to interpret RFP's. Whether the request specifies page count, double sided or recycled with no binding, RFP's requirements are being crafted more and more by contracting staff and less by project managers and right of way practitioners. Our actual technical ability often becomes secondary to our ability to count pages and interpret forms.

Agencies will get the very best consultant for the job when they focus our RFP energy on the right of way expertise and not the proposal writing process. I believe the focus should be on problem solving, sample approaches to work and high quality successful projects and references. Whether I tell you about my firm in 10pt or 12pt font, the high quality of my work will remain the same.