

# I WANT YOUR RFP:

By  
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## Requests for Proposals or Presumptions

**T**hose issuing Requests For Proposals (RFPs) with hopes of securing a provider for roof consulting services are presented with significant challenges. Procurement specialists, or those responsible for the content of the RFP, often do not fully understand each of the services and products they solicit. On occasion, owners are disappointed at the time of delivery, or worse, in receipt of something completely different than what they thought they were going to get.

RFPs come in a wide variety of forms and content. In its simplest form, the RFP could be defined as an invitation to provide a buyer with a quote for a service or commodity, deliverable within a certain period of time. Building and property owners issue RFPs for everything from lawn care to light bulbs. Regardless of size or stature, owners of single buildings or multiple structures all have specialized needs. Through the RFP process, owners are attempting to fulfill a need, perhaps something that involves a discipline with which they are not familiar. In theory, those issuing the RFP should be in the best position to know what service or commodity is sought. In many circumstances, this is not the case.

The following are excerpts from loosely scripted RFPs distributed to roof consultants by building owners. Some of the sentences have been restructured, but the content and format remains largely unchanged. Italicized text represents those items this author believes could present difficulties or questions for would-be respondents.

### Example No. 1

Area School District issues an RFP from qualified roofing consultants for upcoming roof replacement. Services shall



*Loosely scripted RFPs, lacking a well-defined scope, can result in an installation or service of questionable integrity. Building owners and their representatives need to be specific when soliciting service providers of any discipline.*

include analysis, design, and contract administration services.

This district has ten million dollars worth of roofs. At the present time it is planning to replace two million dollars worth of roofing.

Respondents *may* provide documentation relative to their knowledge, experience, and expertise in all facets of roofing work. This will include knowledge of single-ply roofs, built-up roofs, modified bitumen roofs, insulation, and flashings, etc.

Proposals *may* include information about the qualifications of individuals who would be responsible for these projects. The assigned individuals' availability during construction may also be addressed. Certifications relative to roof design and fire protection may also be highlighted in the proposal.

*It is doubtful that any test or core sampling will be required to complete the work under this proposal.*

Interested firms may also demonstrate their capabilities to provide specifications, construction documents, details, and inspections. Parties must also verify that the firm is independent of manufacturers, contractors, and suppliers.

This RFP does for the owner and roof consulting community what a pickup truck and pair of scissors did for the early single-ply industry. As written, a would-be specifier has to force the document through spell check. If you can spell roof or design, you can respond to this RFP. From this document, we understand that the district has ten million dollars worth of roofing, and intends to replace over two million dollars worth of roofing. WHEN? "At the present time," of course, is fairly vague, but time is relative and the bid dates haven't been set so this should be fairly easy. As it is doubtful that any core sampling will be required to successfully complete the work described under this proposal, respondents have to assume that all details are exactly as shown on the original as-built drawings, provided they are available.

The stage has been set. Would-be respondents to this RFP will likely run the full spectrum as it relates to quality of services rendered. Repeated use of the word "may" and phrases like "it is doubtful" leave the door open to just about anybody that would take the time to issue a response. This owner can fully expect to receive proposals reflecting significant differences in cost, quality, and perhaps a limited (or worse) inappropriate roof system selection.

## Example No. 2

### REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

RFP # 0U812

### PROFESSIONAL ROOFING ENGINEERING SERVICES

We are a municipal corporation with a focus on post secondary adult education.

#### 1.0 Overview of Services

Requesting engineering services for ongoing work at our facility. The type of work *may* include built-up, single-ply EPDM, flexible membrane, and standing seam roofs.

#### 2.0 Bid Procedure

Respondents *should* submit three copies of the response to this Request For Proposal (RFP) in a sealed envelope,

identified as "Proposal for Roof Engineering Services," mailed or delivered to assure delivery before 3:00 p.m. on March 1, 2002 to:

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

We reserve the right to reject any or all proposals. We remain open to negotiation on certain points of the final contract with the qualified proposer.

The proposal shall offer, but not be limited to, the following:

- Listing of similar projects and brief descriptions of same.
- Qualifications of lead individual who will be considered the primary contact.
- Qualifications of personnel who will be assigned to the project.
- Hourly rate breakdown for various service categories, including, but not limited to, the Project Leader, Engineer, and CAD Operator.
- *Three references* for whom similar work was completed.
- Fees related to preventative maintenance inspections of existing roofs.
- Inspection protocol for re-roofing projects.

#### 3.0 Schedule

Feb. 12, 2002	RFP Distribution
March 4, 2002	RFP Due
March 5-14, 2002	Finalist Selection
March 18-25, 2002	Interview Finalist
April 4, 2002	Award of Contract

#### 4.0 Selection Criteria

The following rating system will be used in evaluating the responses and to make recommendation for award:

- The cost of the services proposed — 30%.
- Completeness of all items required by the RFP — 10%.
- Experience of the respondent as it relates to similar work — 15%.
- Experience of the project leader and primary contact — 25%.
- Response from references — 15%.
- Responding firms location — 5%.

Interviews *may* be included as part of qualification process with some of the firms.

#### 5.0 Cost of Proposal

Submitted proposals will become our property, and we are not responsible for any costs incurred by those issuing a response.

#### 6.0 Contract Award

It is our intent to award the contract for a period of five years to one firm. Cost increases for years 2-5 will be based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) that is posted by the Bureau of Labor and Statistics for our region. Adjustments will be made annually, in the month of February.

Example No. 2 is presented in a more organized format with nicely enumerated sections 1.0 through 6.0. Section 2.0 refers to

the submission of responses as the "Bid Procedure." This is good, as the "low bid" is easy to put together. Are they bound to accept the lowest bid? Here again, the word "may" is used in the body of the RFP. When reading through the document, the owner's immediate needs are not clearly identified. Are they interested in bid documents, surveys, or construction observation? Is this one building of approximately 2,500 sq. ft. or multiple sites with a cumulative total square footage in excess of 500,000 sq. ft.? Sections 3.0 through 6.0 were found to contain some pertinent information. The schedule and selection criteria published in Sections 3.0 and 4.0 respectively are probably the most valuable pieces of information in the entire document. The question remains, what do they want?

The obvious question at this juncture becomes, "Okay, then, service providers, what specific information should be included in the RFP?" The tongue-in-cheek comments following each of the above should be reviewed for those who may not yet fully understand what perhaps has happened as a result of issuing poorly prepared RFPs. The general lack of information and "loose script" all but assure that the solicited responses will vary widely in content and cost. Likewise, desirable characteristics such as the qualifications and integrity of the respondents will vary and may be overlooked if the "low bid"

is overemphasized in the selection process. One need look no further than the recently publicized legal proceedings in New Jersey. Unsuspecting school districts were "fleeced" by those representing themselves as roof consultants. This is not an isolated case, and it is reported that other, similar cases are pending.

It is entirely possible that some building owners, in particular those who have had less than desirable experiences with roof consultants or any other service provider, may have nobody to blame but themselves. After all, the process begins with the distribution of the RFP. The following represent some of the items that should be given consideration when issuing your next RFP:

## INTRODUCTION

The introduction segment of the RFP provides the opportunity to inform the reader of the owner's identity and the location and type of building. For example, is this a factory that churns

out pre-cast lawn ornaments, or does the structure house a production line of clean rooms manufacturing bio-medical devices? The difference in occupancy is fairly significant. The point made is that the owner making the lawn ornaments will likely have a higher tolerance for the objectionable odors, noise, and the potential disruption of occupancy sometimes associated with the reroofing process. These are tangible aspects of facility operations that can clearly influence the reader's position related to his or her vision of the owner's goals, objectives, and immediate needs. It is not, however, being suggested that the level of service should vary as a result of the occupancy.



*RFPs must be specific. If requirements are spelled out, RFPs will be more responsive and the quality of work more predictable.*

## SCOPE OF SERVICES

What, when, and how is the product, service, or end result to be delivered? Traditionally, two mechanisms have been used to solicit the services of a roof consultant, neither of which was clearly presented in either of the two examples.

Relative to cost, some responses are based on a percentage of the projected or actual cost of an unidentified project with a likewise unknown degree of difficulty or size. At the other end of the spectrum, there are those who issue RFP with a specific roof area, system, and budget in mind. It would be safe to say that the latter will draw more favorable responses, and one or more of the following will be realized:

1. The design community will pursue the work with more interest, resulting in:
2. More competitive pricing as a result of the well defined scope, and

3. Reasonable assurances that would-be respondents are interested in developing a relationship based on the quality of services rendered, rather than attracting those who are more focused on short-term personal gains.

Include a summary of items or services that will be required to fulfill the terms and conditions of the pending work. Specific issues relative to that, which a roof consultant may provide, can include, but not be limited to, the following:

1. **Roof Design** - Full bid documents, including drawings and specifications, format requirements (CAD format), assistance with the bid process and review, pre-bid, and pre-construction meetings.
2. **Construction Observation** - Full-time or periodic representation; progress meetings and correspondence; daily, weekly, and/or monthly updates. Description of the required format (electronic or hard copy).
3. **Roof Management Surveys** - Scale drawings with penetrations located, forecasted replacement and repair schedules, and (based on a 3-, 5-, or 10-year plan), annual updates of same. NDT roof moisture surveys, generic identification of roof system components through exploratory test openings, warranty inspections, and installation of database on owner's computer system.

## PROJECT SCHEDULE

Inform the reader of key dates or milestones relative to the work that would be considered critical.

1. The date, time, and place those responses are due.
2. Anticipated award and completion dates.
3. Date, time, and place of a pre-submission meeting to answer questions from would-be respondents. On larger projects, give consideration to making the pre-submission meeting mandatory, noting that all post meeting clarifications will be issued through written addenda. Have available for review all existing related material, including, if available, the original building drawings, previous survey work performed by others, and warranty information from adjoining areas that may be impacted by the proposed work.
4. As a courtesy, a date by which all respondents will be informed that a formal selection has been made.
5. Provide the name and phone number of the owner's agent for clarifications relative to the RFP.

## PROPOSAL CONTENT

To maintain a level playing field, the requested proposals should be delivered and structured in the same format. If nothing else, this requirement will assist the buyer in determining if the vendor can follow directions. It is suggested that discussion or information presented in the proposal be limited to the following areas, in order, without exception:

1. **Table of Contents** - Clearly identifies the material of each section by page and number.
2. **Letter of Transmittal** - In a one- to two-page narrative, briefly describe the proposer's understanding of the service to be provided and their intent to provide the service as defined in the proposal.
3. **Firm Description** - A brief description of its size, struc-

ture, legal status, professional registrations, and areas or disciplines where it has provided consulting services. Describe the firm's recent (5-yr.) experience with projects of similar size and scope.

4. **Professional Liability Insurance** - Include coverage, depth, and claim history.
5. **Staff Experience** - List the names, titles, and/or duties of those individuals who will be involved with the project. Include résumés (limited to one page), specific professional registrations, past relevant experience, and contribution in this capacity to past projects.
6. **Project Approach** - Provide a description of the means and methods that will be used to deliver the requested services. Briefly discuss any issues or problems anticipated and proposed resolutions.
7. **Present Workload** - List similar current, committed projects and time remaining to completion. Include reference to project size and scope.
8. **Sub-Consultants** - Include the names and addresses of those who would supplement your effort in the form of a sub-consultant. Of the total effort, state the capacity and approximate percentage of the services that the sub-consultant would provide.
9. **Scheduling** - Require a timeline of rolled up tasks based on the published contract award and completion dates.
10. **Selection Criteria** - Example No. 2 reflected weighted percentages for specific items that were required elements of the proposal. For this method of evaluation to work in the owner's best interest with an emphasis on selecting the most qualified provider, it is important that all responses be structured in the same format.

## SUMMARY

The proposal content listed above is not all-inclusive, and some of the issues presented may not be applicable to every situation. Building owners and those responsible for facilities will likely continue to issue RFPs with overriding tones of mediocrity, presumptive text, and little thought given to their specific goals and needs. The structure and content of the RFP is the owner's first opportunity to set the standard for post award performance and expectations of the selected service provider. In summary, be careful what you ask for; you may get it. ■

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Don Kilpatrick**, a project manager and field technician with INSPEC, Inc., joined the company in September 1985 and spent a dozen years in the firm's materials testing lab. He is fully experienced in roof evaluations, inspections, field testing, nondestructive testing, sample analysis, and roof construction procedures. Kilpatrick is a Certified Asbestos Inspector and a member of RCI's *Interface* Peer Review Board and of the ASTM D-08 Committee.



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