



Brownfields Resources

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Steps in Choosing an Environmental Consultant

Skills, experience, and track records of consultants vary widely. Hiring an appropriate and qualified environmental consultant is crucial in developing solutions that are protective of human health and the environment, in compliance with environmental regulations, and cost-effective. Benefits include the following:

- saving time and money;
- completing projects satisfactorily the first time;
- maintaining good relationships with regulatory agencies;
- submitting deliverables in a timely fashion;
- satisfying all parties involved with the final outcome; and
- minimizing unexpected contingencies.

Note: If you are procuring a contractor for an EPA grant, you will need to follow your own documented procurement procedures which reflect applicable State and local laws and regulations, provided that the procurement conforms to applicable Federal laws contained in 2 CFR Part 200.318.

The following steps are a general guide and intended to help you choose the right consultant for your project.

STEP 1: Determine scope of work. Providing as much information as possible will enable prospective firms to give you more accurate estimates (cost and time) for completing the project. Especially, when you own the property and/or are familiar with it, the process will be facilitated if you compile all the information you have about the property including current and historical operations at and around the site, potential sources of contamination, existing maps, and company records on where and how hazardous substances have been used and/or stored. The environmental consultant can research these items, too; however, it may take more time and effort. Often, you will be much more familiar with the property in question and its history than the consultant will ever be

– because you have information that may not be recorded in any of the documents available to the consultant. Communicate this information, it will save you money.

What is the work that needs to be done by an environmental professional and what should the result of the work be? Outline a scope of work as best as you can. Having a good understanding of the situation and what needs to be done will assist in determining the best consultant for the project. If you are unsure about what needs to be done at your site and how you should proceed, get help. Environmental state agencies will provide guidance* as will the Technical Assistance to Brownfields communities (TAB) program at Kansas State University. Keep in mind that environmental investigations often encounter unexpected situations and new information that may change the scope of work.

STEP 2: Maximize full and open competition.

Make sure your scope of work doesn't place unreasonable requirements on firms, require unnecessary experience or bonding, specify brand names or include arbitrary actions. These can unduly limit the number of consultants that can submit proposals for your work. Also be sure to advertise your Request for Proposal (RFP) in publications, web sites, and other locations that will maximize the number of consulting firms that will see it including any Minority Business Enterprises/Women Business Enterprise (MBE/WBE). You may also want to compile a list of potential consulting firms that have conducted similar investigations, cleanups, or have performed other services you require and let them know about the RFP. Check with state regulatory agencies (often states maintain a consultants list but will not endorse any firm), professional societies or directories, and trade organizations; and interview environmental attorneys. Contact other companies in your industry, or other

municipalities, who have used environmental consultants before.

STEP 3: Advertise your RFP. Publish or send out your RFP in a way that maximizes the number of qualified consulting firms including MBE/WBE that will see it. Hopefully you will get multiple proposals back. Your goal is to get at least three proposals back for the work you need done. If you are writing an RFP for a local government, or have an EPA grant to do the project work, there are requirements for the way the procurement may be handled. Review and follow the required bid process for your organization and the federal grant requirements.

The RFP should include the following information:

- description of the site, including maps and diagrams, if available;
- discussion of the scope of the project and expected deliverables;
- preferences or requirements regarding assessment or cleanup approaches, data quality, and reporting requirements;
- time constraints for completing the work;
- directions for access to relevant records (such as previous environmental work) and to the site for bidders;
- request for a statement of qualifications of the consulting firm and staff resumes;
- request for references;
- request for unit rates and cost estimates (itemization of costs will allow you to compare proposals better);
- directions for submitting proposals and project contact(s);
- criteria that will be used for review and selection of proposals;
- time and date for a pre-bid meeting to answer questions; and
- information on general requirements for the work including any specific terms and conditions if the project is funded through an EPA grant (i.e. Davis Bacon, MBE/WBE – minority and women-owned business enterprises).

The TAB program at Kansas State University can furnish examples of RFPs upon request.

STEP 4: Review proposals. When reviewing proposals, keep in mind the following:

- How well the proposal compares with the criteria in the RFP?
- Does the contractor have the ability to perform successfully under the terms and conditions of the contract?
- Has the firm worked on projects similar to yours?
- How much work does the company subcontract, and who are the subcontractors?
- Is the consultant knowledgeable about federal, state, and local environmental laws and policies?
- How well does the consultant communicate in writing?
- Beware of bids that are significantly lower than those of competing firms, and overly optimistic time schedules. Be wary of “hard sell” approaches, conflicts of interest, or anything that makes you feel uneasy.
- If something in the proposal is unclear to you, ask.
- Is the company insured and if necessary, bonded?
- Is the company currently involved or has it ever been involved in law suits regarding its work performance?

Make sure employees evaluating proposals are free of conflicts of interest (COI) regarding the consultants applying to your RFP.

STEP 5: Contact references. Even if you are familiar with the reputation of the consulting firm, checking references can be one of the most important parts of the selection process. The following are some questions you may want to ask references:

- Were you satisfied with the consultant’s work?
- Did you have any concerns about the firm’s performance or fees?
- What specific staff members were on your project team?
- Was the project completed on time and within budget?
- Were you kept informed as the project progressed?
- Did you encounter unexpected delays or staff turnover?
- Were these or any other problems resolved to your satisfaction?
- Did the consultant work effectively with regulatory staff, local officials, and you?

STEP 6: Prepare a short list and conduct interviews. Once you have identified the most

qualified consulting firms (based on the criteria in the RFP), arrange for interviews. The interviews may be used to clarify any unclear items in the consultant’s proposal and evaluate the consultant’s qualifications in more depth. Some example questions to ask during the interview may include the following:

- Who will be assigned to the project? Are any of these people at the interview? What is the training and experience of project team members?
- Will the assigned project team be available at the time the project is supposed to start and will the team be available for the duration of the project?
- What is the project team members’ knowledge of federal, state, and local environmental regulations and policies?
- What tasks will be subcontracted and to whom? What is the subcontractor’s experience with similar projects? How will subcontracted service be charged?
- Does the consultant have an established field protocol and chain-of-custody procedure with associated Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for sampling?
- What is the consultant’s current workload?
- What percentage of projects (on average) did the company complete within time and budget constraints?

STEP 7: Make and document the selection. The knowledge you have collected through the consulting firm’s submitted proposal, reference checks, and the interview should provide enough information to select a consultant. By researching a firm, you will get a sense for its honesty, technical competence, and ability to save you time, money, and stress. Be sure to document the findings of your proposal evaluation, reference check, and basis for selecting the contractor you ultimately choose.

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*A listing with associated contact information for environmental state agencies can be obtained at <http://www.smarte.org> (go to “Links” on the top toolbar).

Glossary of Terms

Brownfield Site • Abandoned, idled, or under-used property where redevelopment or reuse is complicated by real or perceived environmental contamination.

COI • Conflict of Interest

EPA • United States Environmental Protection Agency

MBE/WBE • Minority Business Enterprise/Women Business Enterprise

SOP • Standard Operating Procedure

RFP • Request for Proposal

TAB • Technical Assistance to Brownfields

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