

# ABCs of RFPs and RFQs

Private Practice Division  
American Planning Association



# ABCs of RFPs and RFQs

1. What's the Difference?
2. A Public Agency's Perspective
3. A Consultant's Checklist



What's this about?

The most effective practices in the use of Requests for Qualifications (RFQs) and Requests for Proposals (RFPs) by planning agencies seeking consultant services.



# Part 1:

## The Difference Between RFPs and RFQs



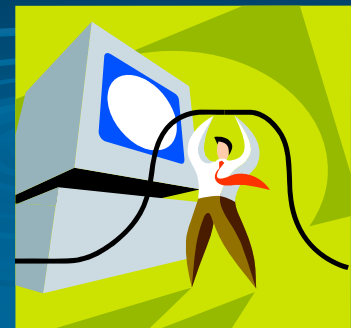
# A RFQ is a Request for Qualifications

- Describes the scope of work to be undertaken
- Identifies budget
- Lists evaluation criteria for submitters
- Requests the firm to submit its qualifications for the work by certain date and time and to address
- May require an approach statement

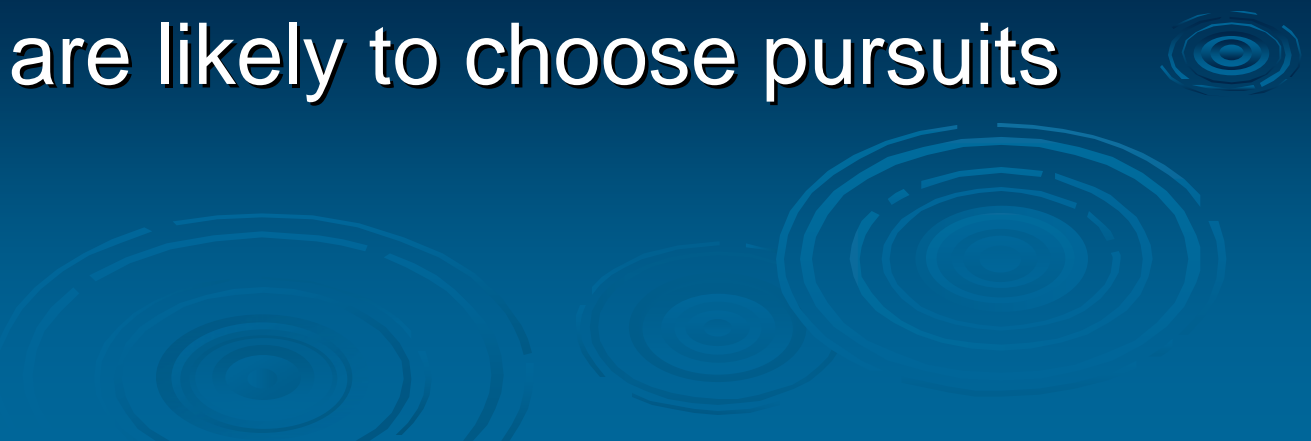


# A RFP is a Request for Proposal

- Describes the project goals and work to be undertaken
- Asks for a scope of work from the consultant to accomplish the work
- Requests personnel assignments, a cost estimate and schedule



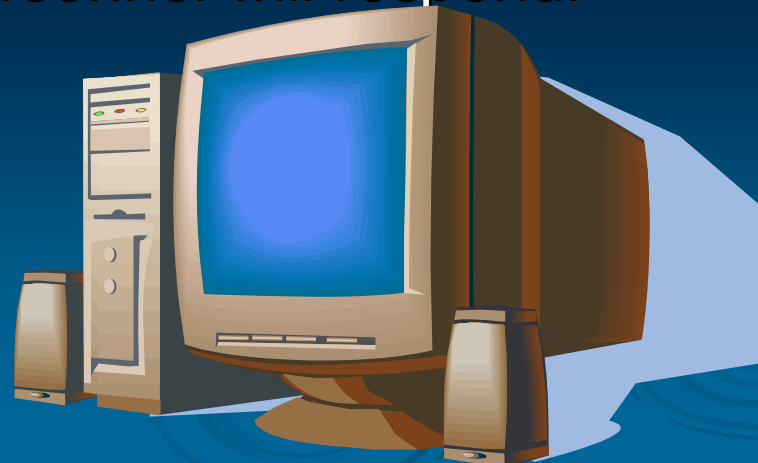
# What Type of Firm Do You Want to Hear From?

- A firm that is busy doing the kinds of things you want; one that chooses to put its current clients first.
    - But, it costs money for consultants to respond to RFPs.
  - Busy firms are likely to choose pursuits carefully.
- 



# When To Use a RFQ

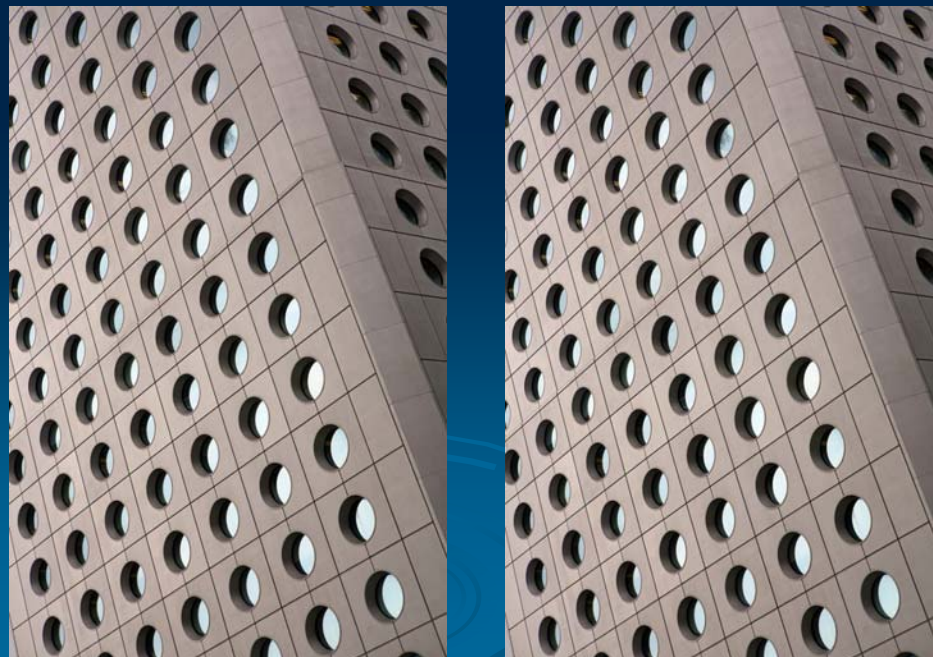
- When you don't know firms that could do the work
- Preparing a qualifications package requires much less time than a proposal, which will make it easier for busy firms to respond.
- Many firms that are qualified and have available and interested personnel will respond.





# How To Use a RFP

- Provide firms a budget estimate for the work.
- Solicit firms you already know are capable.
- The proposal submitted allows you to evaluate the assigned staff and determine if the firm understands your needs.

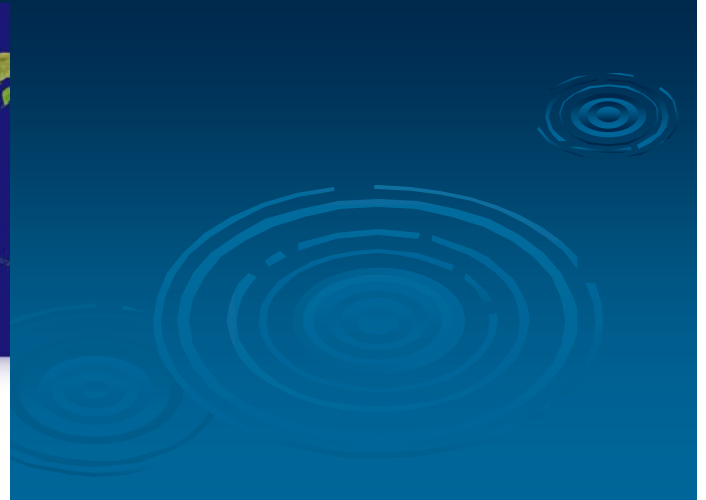


# Part 2: The Public Agency Perspective on RFPs and RFQs



# Critical Factors in the Review of an RFP

- Use a well-rounded evaluation committee
- Develop evaluation criteria carefully
- Engage in an honest exchange of information



# Use a Well-rounded Evaluation Committee

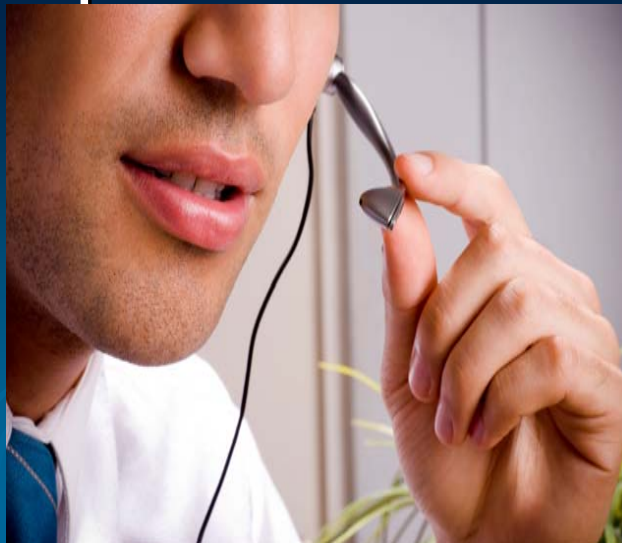
- Include the affected departments
- Also, include those that may be indirectly affected by the proposed project



# Develop Evaluation Criteria Carefully

An evaluation checklist/scoring system:

- Allows Evaluation Committee to focus on pre-determined critical elements
- Enables fair comparisons of widely varied proposals or qualification statements



# Engage in a Genuine Exchange of Information

- Ask pertinent questions and provide honest answers:

Essential in selecting the right firm

Is the work being requested a good match with the skills and experience of the consultant?

Consistently applying these techniques for reviewing an RFP will:

Increase the chances of success

Reduce the level of uncertainty and stress often associated with the selection process.





# Part 3:

## The Consultant's RFQ/RFP Checklist



# Can you win?

- You won't win if:
  - The competition has the right set of skills and you don't.
  - The competition has been following the project and you have not.
- You can win if:
  - You have done your homework; you know the project and the players.
  - You have the right skills; you have the time and personnel. You are passionate about this type of work. You want it.

# Do you know the project?

- If it is a surprise, forget it! It's too late. By the time a RFQ or RFP is issued, other firms have approached the agency before you.
- You wrote the scope of work and know the project better than others! You may have even given the agency the idea.

# Is scope of work right?

- Vague scope indicates agency may not really know what they want.
- The agency has written a clear scope of work that is achievable and meets their objectives.

# Can you respond efficiently?

- It's expensive to respond.
  - Can cost as much as 10% of the project budget.
  - Are you willing to spend, and probably lose, \$10,000 for a \$100,000 job?
- Tools to respond efficiently:
  - Firm and project description sheets
  - Resumes already tailored to the scope for easy assembly
  - “Boiler plate” material ready about the firm’s finances, volume of work and other affidavits that you are legally established to provide consulting services

# Are you the right firm for the job?

- Have the right skills to do the work?
  - Even so, does the agency think you don't have them? What is your firm known for?
  - Is a competitor better known for this type of work? Have they done it before and have better connections?
  - If the answer is no, then walk away. You are not a good fit. You won't win.
- You are the best person/firm to do the work.
  - Your skills, personnel and project experience are the right matches with the pursuit objectives.
  - Go for it!

# Do the Scope and Budget Match?

- Does the agency have the money? Some agencies write detailed scopes anticipating that they can obtain \$1M.
  - If they only have \$300K and do not reduce the scope, how should you respond?
    - Walk away? Or state what can be done now for \$300K, that other scope items can be deferred and await future funding.
    - However, this may be viewed as “unresponsive” by the agency.
  - Watch out! You just lost the job. Other firms may “low ball” it just to get the work.
- Budget and scope match. The scope and funds to carry it out are adequate. Give it a shot.



# Is the agency fishing?

- Do they really want free advice?
  - Some agencies issue RFPs to get ideas, decide if they can do the work themselves, or issue targeted scopes to consultants.
  - If so, is it worth it to you to respond?
- The agency has the money.
  - The agency states it has the funds to complete the work.
  - There are no pending grant applications for the work.

# Is the schedule reasonable?

- The schedule does not match the need.
  - Why the rush? What is the reason for the timing?
  - Does the agency have to spend money by a certain date or lose it? That's legitimate. But, if you can't deliver in time, don't respond.
- The schedule is right for you.
  - You need the work.
  - You have the people.
  - You have the time to pursue this effort.

# What is reputation of the agency?

- Some agencies have a reputation for certain practices that are problematic to consultants.



# What is reputation of the agency?

- The agency and you can work as a team.
  - Often an agency wants to be an active part of the project.
  - An agency that “buys” into the project will help sell it to their policy boards.



# What is reputation of the agency?

- Working with a particular client can enhance your reputation.
  - Prestigious clients can improve your reputation. Consultants are proud of the high caliber of their clients.
  - Consultants like to do work for clients that get things done, rather than collecting reports that sit on a shelf. It shows that you too can get things done for your clients.

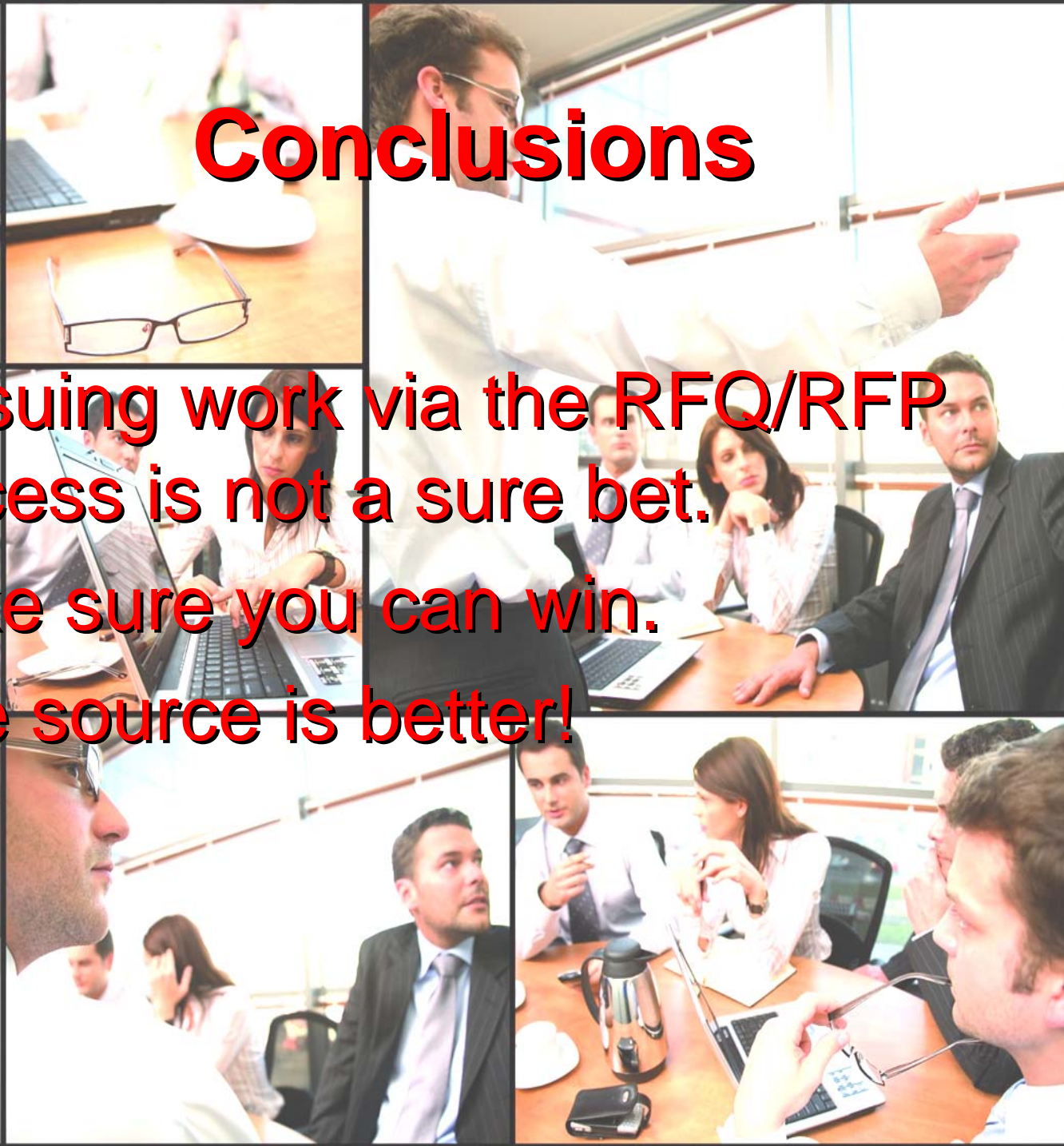
## So, should you respond to a RFQ or RFP?

- If you don't have the skills or the personnel--but you want to introduce self/firm to agency...
  - Responding to an RFQ or RFP is not a good idea. It is an expensive way to lose. You probably will not get selected.
- A better way: request a meeting to introduce your skills and personnel. It is one-on-one, cheaper and more effective.



# Conclusions

- Pursuing work via the RFQ/RFP process is not a sure bet.
- Make sure you can win.
- Sole source is better!





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