# WRITING A

# REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS (RFQ)

*Realizing the full value of consulting services requires a careful approach to selecting, contracting, and partnering with consultants. One of the most critical steps in the process is finding a good "fit" – an individual or firm that is capable of completing the work effectively, and whose values and approach are well aligned with those of your team.*

There are many ways to identify potential consultants. It is usually best to have an open process, rather than just select someone you already know, because if done well:

- It encourages fairness and transparency and mitigates potential conflicts of interest, favoritism, and bias.

- It increases the diversity of your candidate pool, introduces you to candidates you may not have considered otherwise, and in doing so, helps you find the consultant best suited to your needs.

- Engaging with multiple applicants helps you build clarity about your goals, and your project will be more likely to succeed as a result.

It is not always necessary to require written applications from consultants. Consider whether you can begin your search with a more relational approach (e.g., get-to-know-you meetings). Sometimes, this is more efficient for all involved, or more appropriate to the project (e.g., when interpersonal skills are an essential qualification for the work).

However, in situations where written applications would be useful, issuing an RFQ (Request for Qualifications) is a good practice that can help you narrow the field. An RFQ is different from an RFP (Request for Proposals). An RFQ asks candidates to submit a brief summary of their qualifications, while an RFP requires them to submit a comprehensive explanation of how they would approach the project, often including a full description of methods, budget, and more.

Responding to an RFP is time consuming and costly for consultants, and sometimes it requires them to offer up their ideas (i.e., their intellectual capital) without receiving anything in return. It can also be difficult to respond to an RFP effectively because candidates often do not understand the client's needs well enough yet to craft a strong approach to the project.

Understandably, many capable consultants simply choose not to respond to RFPs unless they are personally invited to do so or have good reason to believe they would be a top contender for the work. The time and costs involved can be especially prohibitive for small consulting practices, which may be disproportionately owned by women and people of color, creating a vicious cycle that perpetuates inequities in the field.

To ensure an equitable process and attract the most diverse, competitive pool of applicants possible, it is usually in your interest to begin with an RFQ, rather than an RFP. After reviewing the qualifications of those who respond, you can meet with a few leading candidates to get to know them. Then, you can request a proposal from one or two finalists.

If possible, compensate all candidates for time spent responding to your open call for applicants. This is an equitable practice that enables consultants with more limited resources to stay in the game.

# Basic Components of an RFQ

**PURPOSE**

- Provide a clear, concise summary of the purpose of the project in a few sentences or bullet points.

**BACKGROUND**

- Provide a brief overview of the client and the context for the project. Specific content and level of detail will vary from one project to another but may include:
  - How or why the project came about/how the project aligns with the client's work
  - Potential challenges and/or opportunities the work may present
  - Early thinking about how to approach the project

**SCOPE OF SERVICES**

- Describe the work to be completed and the outcomes for which the consultant will be accountable. The objective is to help prospective applicants understand the nature of the project, not to dictate a precise methodology for the work. Focus on what you hope to achieve, leaving space for the consultant to exercise creative license in partnering with you to craft the best approach.
- Include any relevant parameters regarding the timeline for completing the work.
- Describe the nature of expected deliverables (e.g., publication, presentation, staff engagement), as well as their intended audience and utility (i.e., who will use the deliverables and how).

**QUALIFICATIONS**

- Provide a summary of the qualifications (values, skills, experience) you are seeking in a consultant.

**SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS**

- Provide instructions on how applicants should respond to the RFQ. You might request:
  - Bios or résumés for the staff who would be assigned to the project
  - Background information on the consulting firm, if applicable
  - One to three relevant work samples
  - If necessary, brief responses to one or two questions
- Include instructions about where and when to send materials
- Include instructions about to whom applicants may direct questions, should they have any.

**REVIEW PROCESS AND TIMELINE**

- Provide information about how you plan to assess applicants, when they can expect to hear from you, and what the next step in the process is.

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

- Include additional information (in the form of attachments, URLs, etc.), if it will help prospective applicants determine whether the project is a good fit.

# Putting It All Together: A Sample RFQ[1]

**MATH IN COMMON®**

**Request for Qualifications: Evaluation of a Five-year Initiative on the Implementation of the Common Core State Standards in Math in Ten California Districts**

**Purpose**
The S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation is seeking a team to manage a formative and summative assessment of its initiative on the implementation of the Common Core State Standards in Math.

**Background**
The S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation (the Foundation) supports the faithful implementation of the Common Core State Standards in Mathematics (CCSS-M) as a critical part of advancing high-quality teaching and learning in the areas of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) education in California. After conducting research to understand the priorities and needs of California's educational practitioners and leaders, the Foundation determined that California's students would be well served through an initiative to support district models of CCSS-M implementation with the goal of identifying, developing, and sustaining promising practices in these districts and scaling these models across the state.

In December 2012, the Foundation invited 27 school districts to apply for support for CCSS-M implementation in grades K–8. Through a competitive process, the Foundation awarded support to seven districts for up to a five-year period. These districts join the Foundation's three current district grantees working on CCSS-M implementation. As a condition of this support, grant recipients are expected to lead in the statewide implementation of CCSS-M by participating in a community of practice and sharing their plans, lessons learned, and tools with other districts statewide.

**Scope of Services**
The Foundation is seeking an evaluation team to capture learning and measure the impact of this effort. An evaluation of CCSS-M implementation inside and across participating districts should inform and strengthen practice throughout and beyond the five-year span of the Initiative. It also should inform other California districts and state policymakers about promising practices for CCSS-M implementation.

The Foundation has identified five key audiences for this evaluation:

(1)   Educators inside grantee districts;
(2)   Educators in other school districts implementing CCSS-M;
(3)   Education policymakers at the county and state levels;
(4)   Foundation board members and staff; and
(5)   Other funders supporting or considering supporting similar efforts.

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[1]This example was adapted from a real RFQ issued by the education team at the S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation in 2013.

The key audiences are diverse, with varied needs and interests related to knowledge and lessons learned. To that end, we expect the evaluation design to include a blend of approaches including multiple methods for collecting data, formative and summative measures, and a range of reporting with an emphasis on useful data that can be fed back quickly to inform practice both within and across grantee districts. The evaluation learning also will inform districts statewide and the California Department of Education. We hope that the evaluation will offer:

(1)    Feedback to districts, teachers, and participants in the community of practice in digestible bites provided frequently enough to inform and strengthen CCSS-M implementation;
(2)    Regular reports to the Foundation that provide tools for learning and course corrections; and
(3)    Summative reports and case studies to capture and share lessons learned about CCSS-M implementation with practitioners, policy makers, and other philanthropists within California and nationally.

The evaluator will involve Foundation staff and grantee districts in the evaluation design process to increase its usefulness. Ideally, the evaluator and the community of practice design/facilitator will align design and subsequent work for better results. The information gathered though the evaluation should inform the community of practice and vice versa.

**Qualifications**
We are seeking an evaluation team with:

•    Experience conducting similarly-sized evaluations within and across school districts, as well as experience with cross-district communities of practice;
•    Demonstrated capacity to use blended approaches to deliver high-quality products, with an emphasis on useful data that can inform practice; and
•    Credibility among educators, policymakers, and foundations.

**Submission Instructions**
If you are interested in leading this evaluation:

(1)    Provide qualifications for relevant staff in the form of bios or résumés.
(2)    Briefly describe your approach to evaluating K–12 education initiatives.
(3)    Provide three work samples from relevant projects.

Please email your materials to [NAME AND EMAIL ADDRESS] by April 26, 2013.

**Review Process and Timeline**
A team of Foundation staff and advisors will review applications. We will follow up within six weeks to invite two or three finalists to participate in conversations with our team about the work.

Consultants support the effectiveness of nonprofit agencies and grantmakers in many ways and on many levels. Based on lessons we've learned as well as the experiences of grantees we support, the S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation offers resources for working with consultants. This series features a guide for helping organizations take steps to find, hire, and partner with a consultant. It includes Foundation-generated essays on working with consultants who specialize in strategic planning, communications, evaluation, and fundraising, as well as a resource developed by Equity in the Center on partnering with equity consultants.

**Access the full series online at sdbjrfoundation.org/effectiveness/consultants or issuelab.org**

*Start by reading this tutorial featuring nine steps to partnering with a consultant. It's accompanied by a set of frequently asked questions.*
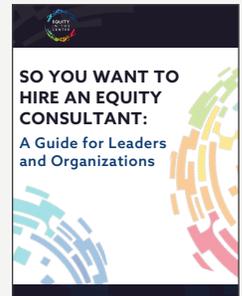
*View these materials when engaging consultants to support specialized topics.*

*If needed, use this guide to develop a Request for Qualifications (RFQ), a more equitable alternative to a Request for Proposals (RFP). In many cases, however, you may benefit from a relational approach – and altogether avoid issuing RFQs or RFPs.*