

## GUIDELINES FOR WORKING WITH CONSULTANTS

### GUIDELINES FOR WORKING WITH CONSULTANTS ON URBAN FORESTRY GRANT PROJECTS

The Department of Natural Resources urban forestry grant program provides funds for projects that improve a community's ability to manage its trees. Potential grant projects that include urban forestry strategic and management plans, tree inventories, or staff training require a certain degree of technical proficiency and a considerable time investment. A community interested in undertaking such a project, but lacking the necessary time &/or expertise, might consider hiring an urban forestry consultant for all or part of the project. Although intended for use with urban forestry grant projects, these guidelines are generally applicable to any urban forestry project where consultants are involved.

For grant projects involving consultant services, the following steps are recommended prior to project implementation:

1. identify and flesh out project goals
2. issue request for proposals (RFP) for consulting services
3. select consultant
4. award contract made contingent upon receiving grant
5. apply for urban forestry grant (don't incur any project costs prior to signing grant contract)

Consultants may also be used to write the urban forestry grant application for you, however, since this service will be provided before the grant is awarded, the cost of this service cannot be charged to the grant, should you be awarded one.

The Department of Natural Resources can assist communities in working with urban forestry consultants. DNR Urban Forestry Coordinators can:

- help identify projects and suggest appropriate areas for consultant involvement
- supply a list of available consultants\*
- review and comment on RFPs and consultant service agreements/contracts
- review and comment on consultant's draft plans, management recommendations, inventory analyses, training outlines, etc.

\* The Department of Natural Resources cannot recommend particular consultants, enforce consultant contracts or mediate disputes. Consult your attorney for additional requirements and procedures regarding contractual services.

For grant projects, DNR approval of completed products is **REQUIRED** prior to reimbursement.

## REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP)

The purpose of a Request For Proposals (RFP) is to elicit bids/proposals from suitable candidates. The RFP should be brief, but must describe the project in sufficient detail that bidders have a good understanding of the project and can respond with precise proposals and realistic cost estimates. The RFP should include:

### A. Description of project

1. Nature and Purpose—What is the project about? Why are you doing it? How do you plan to use the completed product(s)? Are there unique aspects?
2. Components—What are the various parts of the project? What products will the consultant be required to provide? What will you provide?
3. Context and Time Frame—What background information does the consultant need to know about your project? your community? What project constraints are there? When will the project begin? end? If draft documents are required, when is the first draft due? When are completed documents due?

### B. Description of services

1. Who Does What?—What, specifically, do you want the consultant to do? Break the project down into tasks and indicate which ones the consultant is to perform, which you will perform. Specify any additional personnel who will be working on the project and what tasks they will perform. Specify whether briefings, presentations, or other meetings will be required. Indicate whether facilities, equipment, or other support will be provided.
2. Compensation—How and when will you pay the consultant? Is this negotiable? Depending on the project and your needs, consider flat fee, fixed fee plus expenses, per diem, or other payment basis. Indicate payment schedule, such as periodic payments, down payment with balance upon completion, or lump sum upon completion. For grant projects, specify final payment contingent on DNR approval of completed product(s). Regardless of payment method or schedule, specify that proposals must itemize costs.

C. Request for qualifications—Ask for a summary of bidders' education, training, practical experience, certifications, professional memberships, etc. relevant to the project.

D. Request for references and sample(s) of similar work—Request telephone numbers for all references. Specify samples be recent, similar to your project, and include sufficient information to evaluate bidder.

E. Deadline and procedure for submitting proposals and awarding contract—Allow 3 to 4 weeks for bidders to respond. Indicate what criteria will be used to evaluate bidders. Indicate how and when successful bidder will be notified. If appropriate, specify that awarding of contract will be contingent on grant funding.

F. Name and telephone number of contact person—Contact should be project manager or person best able to answer questions from prospective bidders.

G. Miscellaneous

1. Definition of terms—Terms such as “comprehensive,” “management,” “strategic,” are subject to interpretation. Define ambiguous terms according to your needs and expectations.
2. Reference to industry standards—Technical specifications and safety standards (Tree Care Industry Association, International Society of Arboriculture, American National Standards Institute) should be cited for projects with staff training and/or tree work components.
3. Stipulations for specific equipment—You may want to specify certain computer software &/or hardware systems you currently use or intend to use in the future to ensure compatibility with your department's system (particularly useful for a tree inventory, allowing you to update it after the project is completed).

### PRE-BID MEETING

Host an informational meeting prior to the deadline for proposals. Interested consultants should have the opportunity to visit the client community, ask questions, and meet the project manager and any others who will have input on the project. Such a meeting also allows prospective bidders to size up the competition. These meetings are particularly useful if there are bid addendums or there is information all consultants should hear. Alternatively, you may simply want to meet one-on-one with prospective consultants.

### SELECTING A CONSULTANT

Evaluate proposals and select a consultant based on criteria such as: proposal quality, consultant experience, samples of similar work, and recommendations of previous clients. Contact references and inquire as to consultant's ability to meet deadlines, accessibility during the project, working relationships with others, etc. Avoid selecting a consultant solely on the basis of cost.

### FORMAL AGREEMENT

Upon notification of grant award, formalize project requirements and responsibilities in a signed agreement with the consultant. The agreement must acknowledge all project requirements and clearly identify responsibilities of all parties. Many consultants provide a standard agreement for their services. Whether you accept the consultant's agreement or negotiate one specific to your project, the following elements should be included:

- A. Scope of Services (to include: definitions/terminology, applicable standards and specifications, description of work and who will do what, description of completed product[s], deadlines for completion of project components, penalties, limitations on services, number of meetings and presentations, project monitoring and review,

evaluation criteria and process). Specify a completion date well before the December 31 grant deadline to allow for review and revision(s), as necessary.

- B. Compensation (to include: total compensation, method of payment). For grant projects, specify that final payment is contingent on DNR approval of completed product(s).
- C. Client Ownership of Data, Drafts, and Completed Products (Specify CLIENT will own copyright to consultant's written products and all project data.)
- D. General Terms and Conditions (standard provisions common to any contract, to include: proof of insurance, liability disclaimer, modification of agreement, termination and remedies, settlement of disputes, compliance with applicable laws, record keeping, conflict of interest, equal opportunity, etc.)

## MANAGING THE PROJECT

The project begins when both the DNR grant contract and the consultant agreement are signed. Successful projects depend on effective communications between the client and the consultant and between the client and the DNR. The client is primarily responsible for maintaining these relationships.

- Brief the consultant on political realities, public attitudes, important issues, program limitations, other influencing factors.
- Designate a single project manager with whom the consultant will communicate throughout the project.
- Provide frequent input and active direction to the project. Avoid making assumptions.
- Initiate telephone communications regularly. Hold project meetings/briefings when necessary, as specified in your agreement.
- Address problems as soon as they are perceived. Be direct about any concerns.
- Thoroughly evaluate draft documents for clarity, feasibility, responsiveness to needs, etc. Supply copies to DNR for review and comment.
- Keep on top of the project by thinking ahead, allowing adequate time for review and comment, maintaining familiarity with status of all project components, etc. Periodically review both grant contract and consultant agreement.
- Periodically brief DNR on project status. Inform immediately of problems or any proposed changes to project. **CHANGES MUST BE APPROVED BY DNR PRIOR TO IMPLEMENTATION.**

## A WORD ABOUT CONSULTANTS

Consultants are professionals who take pride in their work. They want the products and services they provide to showcase their efforts and talents. They need your active input and direction to achieve a customized product that will be useful to you and a sample to solicit future clients.

Most will meet initially with prospective clients free of charge. Expect to pay for repeat visits.

Begin the consultant selection process early and be aware of the time it takes your community to make decisions. Consultants may have many jobs planned at any one time and cannot wait several months for a contract and then be expected to drop everything and do your project. The sooner you get on their schedule, the more likely it will be done when you want it to be.

Expect a certain degree of generic material in your product. Format and style, and certain supporting information may be the same or similar to that contained within other products the consultant has prepared. Data and analyses, goals and objectives, management recommendations, budget projections, and similar information should be customized for your unique needs and circumstances.

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