

A/E Selection Guide

CHAPTER 3. A-E EVALUATION AND SELECTION

3.1 Receipt of Qualification Statements

After the deadline for receipt of new or updated qualification statements has passed, the contracting officer:

- Prepares an abstract listing the firms that have submitted qualification statements.
- Screens the responses for responsiveness to the set-aside requirements of the solicitation. Ineligible firms are notified by mail that they will not receive consideration.
- Prepares a memorandum to the evaluation board chairperson to forward the abstract, the qualification statements, and the current performance evaluation file for use in the initial evaluation. See Exhibit XI, Transmittal of Qualification Statements to Board. ([EXH 11.DOT](#))

3.2 Initial Evaluation

Before the evaluation begins, the board chairperson is responsible for ensuring that each board member has been briefed on the requirements for safeguarding information used in source selection and is familiar with the scoring plan. The chairperson is responsible for establishing a file to document that the evaluation is carried out in accordance with the plan. The file must contain the rating and ranking sheets with the criteria, and the established criteria weight factors as developed by the board.

Each board member is assigned a reviewer number. The list correlating the assigned numbers with the reviewers' names is kept in a separate designated file.

Each board member completes a rating form for every eligible firm. In addition to judging each firm and assigning a numerical score for every selection element, the board member is responsible for writing concise comments to document the particular strength or weakness noted for each element. These comments will be furnished to unsuccessful firms as part of debriefing and should be written in a clear, objective and professional manner. Comments are mandatory when scores above 8 or below 3 are given and are encouraged for mid range scores as well.

Board members should be alert to information in qualification statements that may affect the firm's eligibility for award. The contracting officer should be notified if a firm's eligibility is in question, such as if the acquisition is set-aside for Indian firms and the reviewer believes the Indian-owned component of the proposed A-E team may not have the capacity to perform 51% of the work.

The board chairperson is responsible for posting the completed score sheets to a summary sheet. If there are extreme variances between the scores assigned to a firm by different board members, the members should discuss the differences to ensure that qualifications were not overlooked.

The initial ranking summary sheet is used to calculate an overall ranking of the firms. The board must identify at least the three highest ranked firms for the short list of "most highly qualified" firms eligible for advancement to the next stage. If more than three firms are grouped closely in terms of overall score, it may be appropriate to include more than three firms on the short list. The board chairman is responsible for notifying the contracting officer of the results of the initial evaluation.

3.3 Debriefing

After the initial evaluation, and again after final selection, the contracting officer notifies firms that have been excluded from further consideration and advises them of their right to either a pre-award or post-award briefing. Unsuccessful firms must request a debriefing within three days of notification or lose their right to receive one.¹¹ Each firm is entitled to only one debriefing per acquisition; i.e., one firm is not entitled to both

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a pre-award and a post-award debriefing. The information that must be included in a pre-award debriefing is summarized in the sample letter in Exhibit XII, Notification to Non Short-Listed Firms. The contracting officer may respond to a timely request for a pre-award debriefing by providing the required information in writing or in person. The contracting officer may defer the debriefing to after award and give a post-award debriefing if a pre-award debriefing is determined to be not in the government's best interest. ([EXH 12.DOT](#))

3.4 Short-list Evaluation

The short-listed firms are further evaluated through formal interviews, additional data submitted by the firms with their presentations, references, and other means as determined by the board. The purpose of this evaluation is to make a final recommendation, in order of preference, of the firms eligible for negotiation of a contract.

In preparation for the interviews, the chairperson, in consultation with the contracting officer and board members, sets an agenda for the interviews. Topics must be within the announced evaluation criteria and a set time limit should be given for each firm's presentation. Interviews are normally conducted at a single location such as the ES office, or at a central location such as the project site. Interviews may also be conducted at the offices of the firms, or by telephone. Telephone interviews should be limited to evaluations for small projects or when the board members are familiar with all of the short-listed firms. All firms must be interviewed in the same manner. Only those board members present for all the interviews may do the final ratings.

The board chairperson is responsible for contacting short-listed firms and scheduling the interviews. The board chairperson prepares letters to each short list firm to confirm the interview appointments, request any additional data or information, and forward the necessary project information (e.g., the approved POR or SOW) to enable the firms to discuss their technical approach to the work. See Exhibit XIII, Interview Confirmation to Short Listed Firms. ([EXH 13.DOT](#))

The board will consider the initial submittal and any additional submittal information received prior to the interview date if a firm declines to participate in the interview.

The board remains intact until the selection authority authorizes the contracting officer to begin negotiation, as the board may have to respond to queries by the selection official for additional information, clarification, revisions, etc.

3.5 Final Selection Report

Upon completion of the interviews, the board should study any other available information such as reference checks (see Exhibit XIV, Reference Check Worksheet), recent performance reports, and additional qualification data submitted by the A-E firms. The board scores and ranks the short-listed firms a second time, in the same manner as used for the initial evaluation, as a result of the interviews and new findings. In the event that the final ranking differs from the short-list ranking, it is crucial that the individual scoring sheets contain adequate written comments on the strengths and weaknesses resulting in the scores. Such documentation is often critical in defending against protests by unsuccessful firms. ([EXH 14.DOT](#))

The chairperson drafts a report to document the results of the evaluation and the considerations upon which the recommendations are based, including the names of the board members (but not their assigned reviewer numbers as used on the score sheets), the selection criteria utilized, a description of the discussions and evaluations conducted by the board, the rank order of the three or more firms determined to be most highly qualified to perform the requirement, and detailed information supporting the rankings and recommended selection. See Exhibit XV, Evaluation Board Report. ([EXH 15.DOT](#))

The contracting officer reviews the report, prior to its submission to the selection official, to ensure that it contains sufficient information on the selection process followed and convincing justification for the

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recommended selection.

The board chairperson is responsible for preparing a file to accompany the Chairperson's A-E Selection Report with the following:

- Responses of the selected firms to the CBD announcements,
- Minutes of all meetings,
- Board appointment memorandum
- Evaluation sheets from each board member with the scoring and ranking, and board members' reports relevant in the evaluations.
- Special submittals from the selected firms.
- CBD announcement.
- List of firms that responded to the CBD announcement and firms added from data files.
- Letters and other documents furnished by others about the short-listed firms.

The Contracting Officer then passes the A-E Selection Report and supporting file to the selection authority. See Exhibit XVI, Source Selection Memorandum. ([EXH 16.DOT](#))

3.6 Final Selection

The selection authority reviews the recommendations of the evaluation board and makes the final selection. The final selection must be a listing, in order of preference, of the A-E firms eligible for contract award. In accordance with FAR 36.602-4, the selection official may only consider the firms recommended in the Chairperson's A-E Selection Report, and must provide a written justification for selecting as most preferred a firm other than the one listed by the evaluation board as most highly qualified. The final selection approval is the authority for the contracting officer to initiate negotiations with the most preferred firm.

3.7 Short Selection Process

Either of two short selection procedures is permitted for contracts not exceeding the small purchase limitation:¹²

- The final evaluation board report may serve as the final selection list without further approval;
- The board chairman may review and rank firms without the board's participation and submit a recommendation to the source selection official. When approved, the chairman's recommendation becomes the final selection list.

3.8 Notification to Firms

Upon receipt of the final selection approval by the selection authority, the contracting officer must notify, in writing, the A-E firm finalists except the highest ranked selected firm, that they have not been selected to proceed to the negotiation phase. The same rules applicable to pre-award and post-award debriefing of firms eliminated in the initial evaluation apply to non selected short-list firms. See Exhibit XVII, Short-List Notification of Non Selection. ([EXH 17.DOT](#))

At the time of final selection, the identity of the selected firm may be disclosed.¹³ If the acquisition is set aside for small businesses, it is required that all firms eliminated from consideration (including those eliminated in the initial evaluation) be notified of the identity of the apparent successful firm and be given an

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opportunity to challenge the firm's small business size status.¹⁴ This can be accomplished by sending a notice similar to Exhibit XVII, Short-List Notification of Non Selection. ([EXH 17.DOT](#))

At the same time non-selection notifications are sent, the contracting officer notifies the most highly qualified firm of its selection and an approximate date to expect a request for price proposal. See Exhibit XVIII, Selection Notification. ([EXH 18.DOT](#))