



To bid or not to bid on a project – Is the bidding process right for you? - by Joseph Lecce

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Over the past 10 years in the engineering and construction industry, it has become increasingly more difficult to submit a bid proposal that will in turn, ultimately be the awarded contract. With the competitiveness of competing firms, the quantity of firms bidding the project itself, and the increased labor and project operations costs, winning the contract is like a lottery. This tends for one to ask the question, “Is bidding the right process for me” when selecting an engineer or an architect for a specific project?

With a lot of current projects, the owner is plainly looking for the cheapest and quickest job possible. In some cases, this may be a conducive formula and works successfully for the owner, but with the increased technological, architectural and code emphasis on new and retrofit construction projects, is it wise to go with the “cheapest?”

Going cheap typically means that the lower cost labor will be performing the work on your project. Lower cost labor in the engineering field and others, is typically the entry level, or low experienced personnel performing the work. The principal and senior team come in to the bid meetings and sell the project to the owner, and then bait-switch the project using the lower level labor in order to be profitable. Nothing wrong with young personnel assisting and working on certain projects, but the question asked, is the owner getting the best quality project from their design team? And should the owner be using a more experienced design team for these sophisticated projects?

With the intricate technology and the detailed engineering required these days, is it wise to use inexperienced labor, when for a premium, highly qualified and experienced personnel could be working on your project. The owner needs to asses each project and understand the sophistication and complexity of each project, and ascertain the level of the design team required to produce a high quality product.

This question can depend on a few factors such as, was the bid process performed with pre-qualified engineers, or were the engineers randomly picked based on location or other factors? In the case where the owner looks for the pre-qualified vendor, the owner has already

predetermined the skills and abilities of the selected vendors, thus resulting typically in fairly successful projects. However, even with pre-qualified vendors, a very detailed bid review should be provided by the owner to assure the vendors are as qualified for the specific job as the price indicates. The owner needs to be clearly aware of the exclusions, work scope not thoroughly detailed, or other items that may indicate the vendor is, or is not suited for the project.

Going with the “cheapest, random” contractor can create a situation for excessive change orders, poor quality workmanship, schedule delays, lack off general construction or other knowledges such as permitting and closeout processes, which can create many project inefficiencies and possible cost over-runs.

With the engineering sophistication and technological aspects of current day projects, it may be the “wisest” to pay a premium, go with the non-bid situation and use a pre-qualified contractor who has proven themselves through their skills, knowledge of project, and other technical knowledge required to successfully complete the specific project, regardless of the price (within reason). As the old saying goes, “You get what you pay for.”

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