

TECHNICAL PAPER SERIES

A Municipal Guide for Writing Requests for Proposals for Professional Services

June 2025



NEW YORK STATE TUG HILL COMMISSION

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This paper was prepared in cooperation with GYMO Architecture, Engineering, & Land Surveying.

The Tug Hill Commission Technical and Issue Paper Series are designed to help local officials and citizens in the Tug Hill region and other rural parts of New York State. The Technical Paper Series provides guidance on procedures based on questions frequently received by the Commission. The Issue Paper Series provides background on key issues facing the region without taking advocacy positions. Other papers in each series are available from the Tug Hill Commission. Please call us or visit our website for more information.



A Municipal Guide for Writing Requests for Proposals for Professional Services

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Acknowledgements:

The Tug Hill Commission wishes to thank Matthew Cervini and Mark Tompkins of GYMO Architecture, Engineering, & Land Surveying for their contributions to this technical paper. We relied heavily on their expertise in preparing requests for proposals.

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Introduction

As a municipality in New York State, the process of purchasing goods and services necessary for your operations can be a time-consuming task. There are several sources of information available to help you navigate the process. This technical paper focuses on how to create a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the procurement of professional services (legal, architecture, engineering, surveying, etc.) and relies heavily upon the following two sources of information:

- [Seeking Competition in Procurement](#) (Local Government Management Guide by the Office of the New York State Comptroller)
- [Conducting Your Own Procurement](#) (New York State Office of General Services website)

From [Conducting Your Own Procurement](#), when an agency or public entity cannot get what is needed from a preferred source, a centralized contract, or other existing agency contracts, it is time to conduct a separate procurement process. This is often done in two ways: by using a **competitive bid** or by making a **discretionary purchase**.

Conducting procurement at the local level is guided by the adopted **procurement policy** of your municipality. If you have one, follow it. If you don't, it is time to adopt one.

If purchases are made beneath a dollar limit that is pre-established in your procurement policy, it is called a **discretionary purchase**. You can purchase directly from the business of your choice without a formal, competitive bid process if the purchase is beneath a certain dollar threshold and if you can demonstrate:

- That the purchase meets your needs.
- How and why the vendor was selected.
- The reasonableness of the price.
- That the vendor is reputable and responsible.
- That all internal policies and procedures were followed.

If the potential purchase is above the dollar limit in your municipal procurement policy, you must conduct a competitive bid. **Open competitive bids** go by many names including Request for Proposals (RFP), Request for Quote (RFQ), Invitation for Bid (IFB), and Invitation for Quote (IFQ). The basic competitive bidding process involves creating a document **detailing your needs and requirements**. This document is then posted for a certain period of time, and interested businesses respond to the request by a certain date. After that date, you open and evaluate the responses. Typically, the final selection should be based on either best value or the lowest responsible bidder, depending on your policy and the nature of the procurement.

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As discussed in [Seeking Competition in Procurement](#), the procurement of professional services is an exception to the competitive bidding requirement because the solutions sought from the professional (such as a lawyer, engineer, or architect). Professional Services often require specialized technical skills, expertise, knowledge, creativity, or professional judgement. Because of the specialized nature of these services and the lasting impact they can have on your community, price should not be the sole criteria for selection and award of a contract. For example, if your municipality is planning to hire an engineer to design a new wastewater treatment plant, it is more important to hire an engineer qualified and experienced in the design of wastewater treatment plants, rather than an engineer with little to no experience in the design of wastewater treatment plants but the lowest price.

However, because professional services often involve a significant dollar expenditure, it is important to procure these services in a way that ensures the most favorable terms and conditions for your taxpayers. One way to maximize the value of the professional services that your municipality procures is to promote competition by issuing a Request for Proposal (RFP) to procure these services. An RFP allows municipalities to evaluate several important factors before awarding a contract, including qualifications, ability to meet your schedule, and cost. This allows municipalities to select qualified professionals at competitive prices for their municipality.

What is a Request for Proposal?

An RFP is a common method of seeking competition for professional services, where price should not be the sole factor considered when awarding the contract. An RFP generally is a document that provides detailed information concerning the type of service to be provided including minimum requirements and, where applicable, the evaluation criteria that will govern the contract award. Potential service providers typically are supplied with the RFP and are requested to submit proposals by a specified date. Proposals can be solicited via public advertisement, or a comprehensive list of potential vendors can be compiled with vendors contacted directly and provided with the RFP. An RFP can provide a mechanism for fostering increased competition for professional services and can ensure that these contracts are awarded in the best interests of the taxpayers.

How are RFPs Evaluated?

RFP procedures should include a comprehensive, fair solicitation process. Prospective professionals should be made aware of your locality's needs, the procedures involved in responding to the RFP and the process for evaluating proposals. Evaluation criteria and any

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weighting or ranking of the importance of those criteria should be set forth in the RFP. The evaluation criteria should include factors in addition to price such as qualifications, relevant experience, staff availability, work plan and methodology to achieve desired result, and estimated completion times. The process should be based on a fair and equitable review and evaluation or ranking of the proposals.

Creating a Clear and Defined Scope of Services

Before issuing an RFP, it is important to thoroughly identify the scope of professional services your municipality requires. A clear scope of services can reduce ambiguities in the RFP and result in better competitive pricing for your taxpayers. For example, if you were to ask three car dealerships “how much for a truck”, the range in pricing you would receive could extend from the cheapest model to the most expensive model that each dealership carries. However, if you were to ask the same three dealerships “how much for a truck that can seat X people, can tow Y pounds, and has a minimum Z horsepower engine,” the range in pricing you would receive would be much smaller, and would be based on your specific needs. The same can be said for professional services. It is important to include as much detail as possible about the scope of services you are expecting from your professional in the RFP. A well-planned effort can help encourage qualified providers to respond to the RFP and ultimately result in increased competition and potential cost savings. An example of an RFP is included for your reference in the appendix.

Common Elements of an RFP

RFPs typically include the following:

1. Project Description – this should summarize the municipality’s needs and the reason for the project. The more detailed and specific the better. If there has been any preliminary work done for the project by the municipality, committee, or another firm or professional it should be described here. Some examples include results of relevant Community Surveys, Reports, Master Plans, or Drawings. Depending on the project, it may be beneficial to include copies of these documents in the RFP. If there are no project specifics, then a request for qualifications may be the better document to use.
2. Scope of Services – this is a detailed description of what needs to be accomplished by the Professional, including specific deliverables and key milestones.

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3. Anticipated Project Schedule – knowing the timeline will help firms responding to the RFP know that they can meet your municipality’s requirements. The project schedule can influence the cost.
4. Proposal Evaluation – be clear about the criteria being used to evaluate the proposals as well as the timeline for vendor selection. Specific factors that will be used to assess proposals may include experience, qualifications, pricing, and methodology.
5. Description of Funding Source – if applicable, this should be described, and any requirements of the funding source should be included or referenced. Some funding sources have specific requirements for the procurement of professional services, which should be researched prior to issuing the RFP.
6. Municipal Contact Information – name, phone number and email for the municipality’s point of contact for questions
7. Proposal and Submission Requirements – detailed instructions on how to format and submit the proposal so that reviewers can easily and effectively compare proposals. An example of elements commonly included in a response to an RFP include:
 - a. Cover letter
 - b. Firm Profile
 - c. Team Description
 - d. Similar Project Experience
 - e. Project Approach
 - f. Schedule/Timeline
 - g. Fee

Appendix: Sample RFP

Request for Proposals for Professional Services for Improvements to the Village of Anytown Park

1. Introduction

The Village of Anytown is seeking proposals from qualified firms to design improvements to the Village Park, located at 1234 Main Street in Anytown NY. The existing 456-acre park is currently used by residents for picnics, hiking, and swimming in the community pool. The Village Park Committee recently surveyed park users asking them what improvements they would like to see at the park, which revealed that parking and walking trails are the items that are in the most need of improvement at the park. The Village is seeking qualified firms to develop and design a new 50-car parking lot and extend the existing walking trails to create a loop around the pond. The Village was awarded a NYS Parks Grant in December of 2024 to assist in paying for construction and technical costs associated with the project.

An optional pre-proposal walkthrough will be held at the project site (1234 Main Street in Anytown NY) on Monday January 27, 2025. Attendees should notify the mayor if planning to attend. Proposals must be submitted by email to Anne Smith, Mayor, at anne.smith@anytown.com no later than 5:00 PM on Friday, February 7, 2025.

2. Scope of Services

It is the intention that the selected consultant will provide all foreseen professional services for the design of the project and administration of the bidding process. The selected consultant will undertake the following tasks:

- The Project Manager shall attend monthly Village Board Meetings to provide an update on the project status to the Village Board.
- Analyze existing park use and select suitable location to support additional parking for 50 vehicles.
- Analyze existing trail use and select suitable pathways to connect the existing walking trails on each end of the pond.
- Collect existing conditions data suitable for the design of the new parking facility and trail.
- Design the new parking facility and trail in accordance with applicable laws and standards.
- Estimate probable construction costs.
- Provide project related technical assistance and documentation necessary for the State Environmental Quality Review (SEQR) coordinated environmental review process.

- Prepare construction documents for the new parking facility suitable for a public competitive bid.
- Prepare documents necessary for the Village of Anytown to put the project out for a public competitive bid.
- Assist the Village with administration of the bidding process, review bids that are received, and make a recommendation to the Village for the award of the construction contract.
- Existing trail use and select suitable pathway to connect the existing walking trails on each end of the pond
- Collect existing condition data suitable for the design of the new walking trails.
- Design the new walking trails in accordance with applicable laws and standards
- Estimate probable construction costs
- Provide project related technical assistance necessary for the State Environmental Quality Review (SEQR) coordinated environmental review process
- Prepare construction documents for the new walking trails suitable for a public competitive bid.
- Prepare documents necessary for the Village of Anytown to put the project out for a public competitive bid.
- Assist the Village with administration of the bidding process

3. Deliverables

The following deliverables are required:

3.1. Preliminary Progress Drawings

Approximately 30% design drawings for the parking area and trail for review by the Village. This review shall take place at a meeting attended by both the selected consultant and key Village personnel.

3.2. Construction Documents

Final plans and specifications stamped by a NYS Design Professional, suitable for construction and public bid.

3.3. SEQR Documentation

This includes letters to involved agencies, maps, short or long Environmental Assessment Forms, and other documents required to complete the process.

3.4. Letter of Recommendation

The selected consultant shall review construction bids that are received for

completeness and reasonableness and make a written recommendation to the Village Board for the award of the construction contract.

4. Proposal Format and Submission Requirements

Proposals must be provided electronically as a Portable Document Format (pdf). Proposals that are too large to be sent via email will not be accepted. Proposals shall be submitted in the following format and sequence. All pages should be consecutively numbered.

4.1. Executive Summary

Provide an overview of the firm and how it will approach the project. List the contact information for the person responsible for submitting the proposal and responding to any questions.

4.2. Project Experience & Capacity

Describe how the firm has the experience and capacity to complete the tasks in a professional and timely manner. Summarize relevant prior work experience and provide contact information for previous clients. Clearly describe any subcontracting or partnering arrangements.

4.3. Key Personnel

Identify all key personnel involved in each task. Attach resume and professional qualifications and certifications for key personnel including subcontractors and partners.

4.4. Approach & Methodology

Provide a clear and straightforward work plan that demonstrates an understanding of the project. Demonstrate how the work plan will help the Village efficiently and effectively complete the project. Highlight any unique approaches to the work that sets the firm apart from others. Describe any recommended variations to the Tasks or Deliverables that would clarify or simplify the project and its administration, or that would provide better value to the Village.

4.5. Project Timeline

Include a detailed project timeline that outlines key milestones and deliverables, from project initiation to final completion. The project must be completed by November 30, 2025.

4.6. References

Include a minimum of (3) references from past projects of similar scope.

5. Response Evaluation

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

Criteria	Maximum Score
Relevant experience and demonstrated expertise	30
Understanding of Project	20
Quality of past work and references	20
Cost-effectiveness	20
Proposed timeline	10
Total Possible Points:	100

The Village will evaluate each response and select the firm that is the best fit for the organization and the project and enter negotiations to define a scope of work and budget that provides the best possible value. The Village may conduct interviews as part of its selection process.

The Village reserves the right to:

- Amend, modify, or withdraw this RFP;
- Reject and/or all proposals;
- Negotiate with and award contracts to multiple firms;
- Waive any informalities, or;
- Only award contracts for certain tasks.

6. Submission Deadline

Proposals must be submitted by email to Anne Smith at anne.smith@anytown.com no later than 5:00 PM on Friday, February 7, 2025. Any proposals received after this time will be rejected.

7. Reference Documents

The following documents are available by accessing the following link:

- Results of the Community Park Survey
- Mapping that was included in the NYS Parks Grant Application.

[Anytown/shareable/folder/2025ParkRFP](#)

8. Timeline

The target date for selection is April 1, 2025.

9. Questions

Questions related to this RFP should be directed to Anne Smith at anne.smith@anytown.com, or (123) 456-7890.