

ARE GOVERNMENT CLIENTS BECOMING MORE CONSULTANT-FRIENDLY

A panel of public sector clients gave insights on new approaches to procurement. The panel was moderated by Patricia Lancaster, FAIA, Commissioner of New York City Department of Buildings. Speakers were Edward A. Feiner, FAIA, US General Services Administration, Washington, DC, and Mark Boddweyn, VP Design and Construction, Hudson River Park Trust, who procures design and professional contracts, and CM's and construction contracts.

Patricia directed attention to all the federal agencies that now have web sites, outlining their procurement policies, and publishing RFP's that greatly assists design and construction firms in the preparation of their proposals. Some of the most notable; the U.S. Postal Service, Department of Commerce, State Department, Department of Health, VA Medical centers, as well as many city agencies who list ways to use their web sites to help consultants learn more about procurements. The panelists discuss the benefits, and answered questions.

EF One of the dividends of the process on our web site is that all of our documents, criteria, standards and building guides are there. Another dividend is if you've been selected as the lead designer and firm, and get shortlisted, there is a gap of about 5 weeks, where you can put a team together that includes all of your consultants, structural, geotechnical, etc. That goes into your SF330, and it's publicly announced, and goes to all our regional offices.

MB We do everything in our pre-proposal conferences and in our RFP documents to say who we are and what we are after. We give out a lot of information on past designs, design documents, and take a lot of time to answer questions (even though attendees at these conferences often sit there in silence).

Q. Do other agencies come to GSA to see what they're doing?

EF We hold an exhibit with 22 workshops and lectures on acquisitions, how you fill out forms, and go about getting work. We do that around the country. You also need inside interests and advocacy, and external support from the professional community. It doesn't happen by spontaneous generation, but there is cross-fertilization.

PL Retooling procurement is not a fast process. Meanwhile, get with the program, learn what they do. Get on line, and have your forms filled out so you can do it over and over again. You will make more money working with one agency over and over again, because they ask the questions in the same way every time. However, you can tailor the forms to the individual procurement. By the same token, you've got the sections down the way they want them.

Q. How can the subconsultants find out about a project?

EF It's all done very publicly. It used to be the CBD (Commerce Business daily), now it's FEDBIZ OPPS.gov. They announce the selected shortlisted firms and if they're going to have a pre-solicitation conference.

Q. Participation for MBE/WBE?

MB We have a hard time meeting the WBE goals, since we have heavy construction activity; driving piles, and marine related construction. We bring the general contractor and other subcontractors into our facility, and invite all our contacts in the MBE/WBE community to meet with them. There is a dialog and interaction between the suppliers and subs who want to work for the firms.

Q. How do you approach debriefing if we weren't selected?

PL Absolutely, do call for a debriefing. That's impressive; it shows you care. That said, it's a very difficult thing to tell why we chose one firm over another. Ask, but don't expect a meaningful answer. Sometimes we just don't know. Chemistry, maybe.

However, you want to have a relationship with the agency that allows you to get inside their head in ways that they can't always articulate. They may show you RFP's from other firms, or they may not.

EF We share your pain. So we have figured out a new model to mitigate that pain. We have a 2-step process. You first get shortlisted, then you have 40 days to put your team together for an interview.

The second part is a charrette. The next morning we have four conference rooms. We give you four 30x40 boards and you have 10 hours after you have been briefed on the project, given a model scope, and visited the site. Then you have to produce a vision of what your attitude would be on this project. We have a reception that evening.

The next morning we have an independent jury who have no knowledge of the project, (usually a dean of a local architectural school, a practitioner, an architectural critic), and they independently rank the order. The afternoon chair briefs the panel, merging the SF330 and all the other information, and then the insider group will rank the final order. We pay each team between \$4-5000 dollars for their effort.

Instead of firms coming to us, where they've spent thousands of dollars preparing for the interview, and would often show up with a design, (and they didn't even know what our program was).

I'd rather tell them not to waste our time at the interview. Discuss your project manager, the way you do quality control, your cost engineering, tell us how you're going to do this project, then tomorrow you'll have a chance to show us your talent, and we'll pay you for it."

Now, *that's* consultant friendly.