

Pre-Qualification Pool Professional Engineering Services PROCUREMENT PLAN

1. Purpose and Legal Foundation

This plan establishes a two-Step process for selecting professional engineering firms for infrastructure projects. The primary objective is to significantly reduce procurement cycle time while maintaining full compliance with state law and ensuring fair, competitive access for qualified firms.

The City intends to maximize competition while eliminating repetitive procurement activities that do not add value to project selection. This procurement model separates the evaluation of firm qualifications from project-specific selection so that qualifications are evaluated once and projects are awarded based on the qualifications most relevant to the individual assignment, consistent with Texas Government Code Chapter 2254.

1.1 Legal Authority

This plan is adopted pursuant to and governed by:

- Texas Government Code Chapter 2254 (Professional Services Procurement Act)
- Requires selection based on demonstrated competence and qualifications.
- City of Houston Code of Ordinance, Chapter 15 and Administrative Policies

Price competition is strictly prohibited at all stages of this process. The selection of professional engineering services must be qualifications-based in accordance with §2254.004.

1.2 Benchmark Programs

This plan draws from best practices observed in comparable Texas programs:

- Tarrant County Pre-Qualified Vendor List — discipline-specific engineering rosters with task order issuance from roster, reducing per-project procurement timelines
- City of Dallas Qualifications-Based Selection (QBS) Pre-Approval Program — pre-qualification with robust HUB documentation and outreach requirements built into the pool formation stage
- TxDOT – Rotation program

2. Process Overview

The two-Step process separates the qualification review (Step 1) from the project-specific selection (Step 2). Step 1 is conducted annually, eliminating the redundant qualification reviews previously required on every individual project — a measure specifically designed to address the primary source of cycle time delay in traditional procurement.

2.1 Estimated Cycle Time Impact

Phase	Traditional RFQ Process (Business Days)	Pre-qualification Two-Step Process (Business Days)
Advertisement & SOQ period	30–45 days	Done at pool formation as part of Step 1
Qualification review	60–90 days	Done once, as part of Step 1, and eliminated at project level
Proposal & evaluation	90+ days	14-45 days
Fee negotiation	180 days	7–14 days
Governing body approval	14–21 days	14–21 days
Total estimated cycle time	~18 months	~ 2-3 months

3. Step 1 — Pre-Qualification Pool Formation

3.1 Purpose

The purpose of this step is to establish a standing, SPD-maintained roster of pre-qualified engineering firms organized by category (see Section 3.7). The roster undergoes a comprehensive qualification evaluation once per cycle (fiscal year), thereby eliminating redundant qualification reviews for individual project assignments. Placement in the Pre-Qualified Pool does not guarantee any contract award.

Placement in the Pre-Qualified Pool constitutes a determination that the firm has demonstrated expertise and qualifications necessary to compete for future project-specific selections. Inclusion in the pool is not a ranking of firms, does not establish relative qualifications between firms, and does not create any entitlement to receive work.

Projects funded in whole or in part with federal funds, or highly specialized projects may utilize other procurement procedures (a separate, traditional RFQ process) when required by federal law, grant requirements, funding agency regulations, or management decisions.

3.2 Public Advertisement

The City will issue a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) through the following channels:

- Beacon Bid – COH eProcurement System
- Houston Business Journal, newspaper of record
- Targeted outreach to certified firms through the Office of Business Opportunity and professional associations (TSPE, ASCE Texas, ACEC Texas)

The RFQ will prominently state that the program is ongoing and open to new applicants on an annual basis. This provision is essential to prevent the program from creating a de facto closed market.

3.3 Statements of Qualifications (SOQs)

Firms shall submit SOQs structured to provide standardized, actionable data for committee review. Submissions must address the following criteria:

- **Categorical Experience & Measurable Outcomes:** For each category of expertise for which the firm seeks pre-qualification, the firm must provide three (3) project sheets. Each project sheet must highlight actual versus estimated construction costs and original versus actual project schedules. A single project sheet can be used to demonstrate expertise in more than one category.
- **Standardized Project Sheets:** For each cited project, firms must use a uniform one-page format including: project name, location, year completed, construction cost, project size, and verified client reference contact information.
- **Professional Insurance Coverage:** Firms must provide a summary of current professional liability, workers' compensation, and general liability insurance, including carrier rating and limits of coverage.
- **Professional Staff and Capacity Matrix:** Firms must identify key personnel, their specific roles, and a declaration of their estimated percentage of committed capacity to demonstrate current workload availability.
- **Methodology Statements:** Firms must submit brief descriptions of specific techniques used for:
 - Monitoring contractor activities and construction oversight.
 - Proactively managing Budget, schedule, and quality control.
 - Developing technical solutions and identifying design options.
- **Credential and Compliance Documentation:** Firms must provide current Texas Board of Professional Engineers and Land Surveyors (TBPELS) registration numbers and evidence of required insurance coverage levels.
- **Reference Verification:** Firms must provide contact information for three (3) clients from the projects listed in their SOQ. The City reserves the right to conduct independent verification of the firm's performance regarding budget control, schedule adherence, and quality of deliverables.

3.4 Evaluation and Roster Approval

A review committee comprising Houston Public Works subject matter experts, led by procurement staff, will review SOQs within each category. Firms meeting expertise and qualification threshold are approved for the roster. While there is no cap on the number of approved firms— this threshold is meant to establish firms with sufficient expertise exhibited in the engineering qualification categories.

3.5 Roster Term and Maintenance

The roster of Selected firms and respective qualification categories will be valid for three calendar years. SPD will accept and evaluate new applications on a rolling, annual basis. SPD will publicly post the active roster of firms and accepted expertise categories on its website. Firms may request additional expertise categories annually, though rosters are expected for a maximum of three calendar years. Roster status does not confer any entitlement to contract award and must be explicitly stated in all program documents and communications.

The City reserves the right to suspend or remove firms and expertise categories from the Pre-Qualified Pool for reasons including, but not limited to:

- expiration of required licenses
- failure to maintain insurance
- unsatisfactory performance
- debarment
- material misrepresentation
- failure to respond to repeated project solicitations
- violation of City policies

3.6 Certified Firms

Certified Business Enterprise goals will be established for each project, working with the Office of Business Opportunity, in accordance with the City of Houston Code of Ordinances, Chapter 15, and recent court actions, based on the specific scope of work. Firms will submit required participation documentation during the project-specific selection process.

3.7 Engineering Qualification Categories

The following categories will be utilized for the established pre-qualification pools:

Category	Primary NAICS Code	Technical Focus Area	Core Expertise
1. Water Treatment Plant	541330	WTP, pump stations, process mechanical/electrical	Process engineering and treatment plant design
2. Water Transmission	541330	Transmission mains, large diameter piping	Hydraulic modeling and soil interaction
3. Water Distribution	541330	Small diameter pipes and valves	Civil engineering and utility conflict
4. Wastewater Treatment Plant	541330	Plants, odor control, process equipment	Process engineering and treatment plant upgrades

Category	Primary NAICS Code	Technical Focus Area	Core Expertise
5. Wastewater Conveyance	541330	Collection systems, interceptors, I&I reduction	Asset management and infrastructure rehabilitation
6. Stormwater: Design & Infrastructure	541330	Catchment systems, inlets, storm sewers, site grading	Civil engineering and utility conflict resolution
7. Stormwater: H&H Analysis & Modeling	541330	Watershed modeling, flood mitigation, detention design	Advanced H&H modeling (HEC-RAS, SWMM) and FEMA compliance
8. Structural	541330	Bridges, retaining walls, utility structures	Load-bearing analysis and heavy structural design
9. Geotechnical	541330	Subsurface investigations, soil analysis	Foundation recommendations and soil mechanics
10. Traffic Engineering	541330	Traffic studies, signal systems, roadway rehab, corridor improvements, landscape architecture	Safety, mobility, intersection designs, aesthetics, and traffic operations
11. Architecture & Facilities	541330	Public buildings, operations facilities	Architectural design and building system integration
12. Owner Delivery Support & Compliance	541611	Portfolio-level coordination, administrative governance, and third-party audit of technical deliverables	Project Control Systems, compliance auditing (QA/QC), risk management, and Owner's Representative oversight
13. Utility Engineering	541330	Utility conflict analysis, relocation design	Subsurface Utility Engineering (SUE) and risk mitigation
14. Construction Mgmt. & Inspection	541330	Construction oversight administration, inspection services	Field monitoring and regulatory compliance
15. Surveying & Mapping	541370	Boundary/topographic surveys, ROW mapping	Spatial data acquisition and utility locating

Category	Primary NAICS Code	Technical Focus Area	Core Expertise
16. Environmental	541620	Permitting, NEPA, TCEQ compliance	Environmental assessments and regulatory adherence

3.8 Procurement Path Determination

To ensure the most efficient and effective delivery of projects, the City utilizes two procurement pathways for its pre-qualified engineering firms: the Mini-RFQ Competition and the Rotation Model.

Upon project identification, the City will classify each project into one of these paths based on the nature and complexity of the required services:

- **Mini-RFQ Competitions:** These are required for complex, high-visibility, or non-routine projects. This path allows the City to conduct a comparative evaluation of a firm's technical approach, project-specific team, and capacity, ensuring the best technical alignment for our most challenging infrastructure needs.
- **Rotation Assignments:** These are reserved for routine, standard, or time-sensitive projects. This path is designed to provide rapid, equitable distribution of work to pre-qualified firms without the administrative burden of comparative competition.

Once a project has been assigned to a specific procurement path, that designation remains fixed throughout the solicitation process to ensure fairness and consistency for all participating firms. For continuity, separate phases of projects may remain with initial selected professional service firm.

3.9 High-Capacity Firm Participation

The City recognizes that certain firms possess the organizational capacity to deliver multiple concurrent complex projects. To utilize this capacity, these firms are encouraged to compete for projects via the Mini-RFQ process, which allows for a comparative evaluation of the firm's specific team and project-specific technical approach. While high-capacity firms are eligible for the Rotation, they are subject to the same rotation-reset rules as all other firms to ensure equitable access to routine project opportunities for the broader pool.

4. Step 2 — Project-Specific Selection and Award

4.1 Purpose

Upon project identification, the City will conduct a streamlined competition exclusively among firms included in the pre-qualified roster for the relevant category. This Step 2 process eliminates the redundant qualification review stage and compresses total procurement to approximately three to six weeks.

Because all firms in the Pre-Qualified Pool have previously demonstrated expertise and qualifications required for the category, the project-specific Mini-RFQ focuses exclusively on

identifying which firm is the most highly qualified for the particular project, based on the unique scope, staffing approach, schedule, and technical expertise. Consistent with Texas Government Code §2254.004, no pricing information is requested or evaluated.

4.2 Project Identification and Scope Development

Upon capital project identification (budget authorization, grant award, bond issuance, etc.), Houston Public Works shall develop a detailed, project-specific scope of work to be included in the Step 2 solicitation.

Teams and partnerships are permitted under the following conditions:

- **Prime/Subconsultant Teams:** The prime firm must be pre-qualified in the relevant category and must perform a minimum of 51% of the total project work. Subconsultants do not need to be in the approved pool.
- **Joint Ventures:** Every firm participating in a joint venture must be individually pre-qualified in the relevant category.

4.3 Mini-RFQ Issuance

A simplified project-specific solicitation (Mini-RFQ) shall be distributed to eligible firms in the relevant category. The solicitation response shall be limited to a maximum of three (3) pages, exclusive of resumes, forms, certifications, and required attachments. The response period shall be 14 calendar days, expandable to 30 days for complex scopes. All Step 2 solicitations shall be administered through the City's eProcurement system (Beacon Bid).

The City reserves the right to reject any or all Mini-RFQ responses and may cancel or resolicit any project when it's determined to be in the City's best interest.

4.4 Proposal Evaluation and Ranking

A project-specific evaluation committee, composed of subject matter experts and procurement personnel and determined by the Chief Procurement Officer, will evaluate responses based on the criteria below.

Evaluation Criterion	Weight (Points)	Description
Demonstrated Project Experience	30	Relevance of prior work, specifically regarding project risks and complexity.
Technical Approach	30	Innovation and methodology proposed to deliver defined project deliverables.
Staffing & Capacity	20	Availability, expertise, and committed capacity of key personnel.

Evaluation Criterion	Weight (Points)	Description
Schedule Management	20	Feasibility and realism of the proposed project schedule and key milestones.
Total	100	

Evaluation Procedures:

- Prior to scoring, all committee members must execute a conflict-of-interest disclosure form.
- Evaluation shall be based solely on the firm's specific response to the Mini-RFQ and its relevance to the project's unique technical and schedule requirements.
- Firms will be ranked by total points, with the highest-ranked firm identified as the "most highly qualified" for the project.
- The committee must document the justification for the top-ranked selection, including how the firm's specific qualifications align with the project's critical success factors.

4.5 Fee Negotiation

Consistent with Texas Government Code §2254.004, the City shall commence scope negotiations exclusively with the highest qualified firm. If a fair and reasonable scope cannot be reached, the City shall formally document that determination in writing, terminate negotiations with said firm, and proceed with negotiations with the next-ranked firm. This process shall continue in the order of the evaluation committee's final ranking until a contract is successfully negotiated.

5. Rotation Model

5.1 Purpose

The Rotation Model provides an alternative project assignment methodology for routine professional engineering services where a full Mini-RFQ is not required. This model reduces procurement cycle time while maintaining qualifications-based selection, fairness, transparency, and compliance with Texas Government Code §2254.004.

5.2 Eligible projects

The City shall determine eligibility based on project complexity and risk.

- **Eligible Projects:** Routine engineering studies, standard design assignments, utility relocations, surveying, geotechnical investigations, construction inspection, drainage improvements, and standard roadway rehabilitation.
- **Ineligible Projects:** large-scale or complex treatment plant projects, innovative design-builds, federally funded projects, or any project requiring highly specialized expertise.

5.3 Rotation Order

After establishing the roster, all qualified firms shall be assigned an initial rotation position within each engineering category by lottery, and the results will be published for transparency.

5.4 Assignment Process

The rotation assignment shall follow this protocol:

1. Identification: Project identified and engineering category confirmed.
2. Review: Confirm eligibility of the firm at the top of the rotation based on project-specific requirements.
3. Qualification Check: Assess current qualifications relevant to the specific project scope.
4. Assignment: Offer assignment to the most qualified eligible firm at the top of the rotation.
5. Negotiation: Proceed with fair and reasonable scope negotiation.
6. Re-Ranking: Upon contract execution, the firm shall be moved to the bottom of the rotation.

5.5 Bypass Criteria

The City reserves the right to bypass a firm in the rotation sequence if the firm:

- Lacks the specific expertise required for the project.
- Has insufficient staff capacity or an excessive current workload.
- Lacks necessary specialized certifications.
- Has documented poor past performance

Fails to respond to the initial assignment

Note: Every instance of a bypassed firm will be documented.

5.6 Rotation Groups

The rotation roster is divided into two distinct groups:

- General Group: Open to all pre-qualified firms.
- Certified Business Enterprise Group: Open to firms possessing a valid City of Houston Business Enterprise certification.

Firms may be included in both the General and Certified Business Enterprise rotation groups if eligible. To be considered for the Certified Business Enterprise rotation group, a firm must provide valid City of Houston certification and request inclusion when submitting its pre-qualification SOQ.

To ensure equitable distribution, if a firm is offered and accepts a project assignment from either the General or Certified Business Enterprise rotation, the City will move that firm to the bottom of the rotation order for **both** the General and Certified Business Enterprise groups.

5.7 Scope of work and Reasonableness of Fee

After selecting the top-ranked eligible firm from the Rotation, the City shall request a detailed scope of services and a corresponding proposal. The City shall review the proposal for alignment with the project requirements.

- **Negotiation Protocol:** If the initial fee proposal exceeds the City's independent cost estimate, the City and the firm shall enter into negotiations to reach a fair and reasonable price.
- **Failure to Reach Agreement:** If the City and the selected firm cannot reach an agreement on a fair fee, the City reserves the right to terminate negotiations with that firm, and initiate negotiations with the next firm in the rotation sequence.

The City may use either the "mini-RFQ" process or the rotation process as the Step 2 method. In all cases, the City will document how the selected firm was the most qualified pursuant to State law.

Professional Engineering Services Pre-Qualification Pool RFQ

Step 1 – Pre-qualified Pool (annual)

One-time competitive evaluation; results in an approved pool

Publish RFQ

Beacon Bid * Sep 2026

Qualification Review

By Category * 30 Days

Pool Established

3 Years

Establish a standing, publicly maintained pool of pre-qualified engineering firms organized by discipline (e.g., civil/transportation, drainage/water, environmental, geotechnical, construction management). Firms may apply to more than one discipline. The pool undergoes a one-time competitive qualification evaluation per cycle. Placement in the Pool is good for three years. The Pre-Qualification RFQ for evaluating new firms in the pools will occur annually. Placement on the roster does not guarantee any contract award.

Step 2 – Project Specific Selection/Award

One-time competitive evaluation; results in an approved pool

Issue "mini-RFQ"

Scope, Schedule, Experience

Rank Submissions

2 Weeks

Contract Award

Fee Negotiation * 30 Days

Upon project identification, conduct a streamlined competition exclusively among firms in the pre-qualified pool in the relevant discipline. Step 2 eliminates the months-long qualification review stage and compresses procurement to approximately six weeks. A simplified project-specific solicitation (Mini-RFQ) shall be distributed to all eligible pre-qualified firms in the relevant discipline category. The response period target is 10 to 14 calendar days.

Method	Best Use
Rotation	Routine, repetitive, low-risk engineering assignments

Method	Best Use
Mini-RFQ	Medium-sized or technically nuanced projects where project-specific qualifications matter
Direct Selection	Federally funded procurements or highly specialized