

Aids for choosing consultants

Selecting a consulting engineer can be a challenge, especially when it only happens every year or two. Using the qualifications based selection process required for Federal Aid highway projects can add complexity.

Now WisDOT is offering to share information about consultants from their databases. "We collect information on consultant evaluations and record a numerical score," says Randy Knoche, Central Office contract manager. "Our District staff can run reports and make comparisons, using those scores and other information." The reports can help local governments evaluate consultants, find similar projects, and see what was negotiated.

"When they talk to consultants, they are more informed and can negotiate more efficiently," says Knoche. "While procuring design engineering is very different from buying a car, having this information is like negotiating with a car dealer and knowing the lowest prices they have sold a car to others for."

Consultants are rated on a 1-5 scale according to five categories: project management, human relations, engineering skills, quality of work, and timeliness. Many of the consultant ratings are for bridge projects. The WisDOT District local program coordinator has access to the information and will provide it to locals who ask for it.

The local coordinator for District 1, Kimberly Johnson, trains locals on choosing consultants. She also administers all federally funded locally matched projects in southwestern Wisconsin. In addition, she is a consulting engineer herself.

"The rating information is available, but personally I think it makes a lot of sense to work with consultants who are local and to talk with neighboring communities who have done similar projects," says Johnson. Even though the state and federal guidelines don't require interviews, Johnson believes they are a good way for the government staff and officials to build confidence in the consultants and to make sure they can work together.

In her training sessions, Johnson describes two approaches to interviewing. One is to address the consultant as an employee and ask a series of specific questions. The alternative is to let the consultant make a presentation that covers: the firm, the people who will work on the project, similar projects, and the consultant's thoughts on the issues involved in the project.

"In the training we try to give the locals a feel for what to expect in the answers that consultants give," says Johnson. She also has developed a quick check-off rating sheet to use during interviews. It helps remind the interviewers of important topics that may be overlooked like public involvement, and environmental, right-of-way, and utility issues. Johnson also points out that county highway commissioners routinely hire consultants and can help and advise smaller communities on the process.

For consultant rating information contact the local programs coordinator at your WisDOT District office. For training opportunities and written guidelines, contact Kimberly Johnson, Kjohnson Engineers, Inc., 608/829-3858, or Kaj8293858@AOL.com

Calendar

T.I.C. workshops

Specific details and locations are in the announcements mailed to all Crossroads recipients. For additional copies, or more information, call the T.I.C. at 800/442-4615.

Winter Road Maintenance Prepare for winter operations. This workshop covers equipment preparation, the latest on ice control materials, operations planning, and an opportunity to share experiences and tips for better winter operations.

Oct 4	Green Bay	Oct 10	Cable
Oct 5	Brookfield	Oct 11	Eau Claire
Oct 6	Barneveld	Oct 12	Tomah
Oct 9	Rhineland		

Local Transportation Issues T.I.C. and the UW Local Government Center present an ETN series of five 2-hour workshops that focus on transportation issues. This series is available at over 103 locations throughout Wisconsin. You can register for one workshop or the whole series. Look for a brochure in August.

Fall 2000

- Oct 5 Utility permit process and control
- Nov 9 Effective pavement marking

Winter 2001

- Jan 18 Analyzing traffic impacts on your roads
- Feb 9 Liability for local road agencies
- Mar 9 Transportation Aids

Using Geotextiles You will learn about the many kinds of geotextiles, their costs and benefits, and when and how to use them in road construction and maintenance, drainage projects, soil erosion control and stabilization.

Nov 1	Green Bay	Nov 7	Cable
Nov 2	Brookfield	Nov 8	Eau Claire
Nov 3	Barneveld	Nov 9	Tomah
Nov 6	Rhineland		

UW-Madison Seminars

Local government officials are eligible for a limited number of scholarships for the following engineering courses in Madison. For details, use the form on page 7, call 800/442-4615, or e-mail: Sauer@engr.wisc.edu

Neighborhood Design and Traffic Calming, Oct 11-13

Managing Snow and Ice Control Operations, Oct 23-24

Implementing a Sidewalk Management System, Oct 25-26

Effective Urban Forestry Techniques for Engineering and Construction, Nov 13-14

Soil Engineering for Non-soils Engineers and Technicians, Nov 16-17

Highway Bridge Design, Dec 4-6

Effective Bridge Rehabilitation, Dec 6-8

Minimizing Pavement Damage Caused by Utility Cuts, Dec 11-12

Other Training Opportunities

The Wisconsin Chapter American Public Works **Snow Plow Roadeo** is your opportunity to test the best crew you've got against the best crews from other communities in friendly competition. It's also a great way to get everyone tuned up and ready for winter. Held Wednesday, September 27, 2000 at the Waukesha County fairgrounds. Call Mark Hochschild at 414/761-5372 for more details.