ACEC OKLAHOMA

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ACEC OKLAHOMA Seeks to clarify use of
Qualifications-Based Selection (QBS) for Engineering Services

The recent March 2026 audit by the State Auditor of the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority (OTA) concluded that the OTA follows state laws in their operations, specifically pertaining to the multi-billion-dollar ACCESS Oklahoma program that is currently underway. The audit included comments concerning the selection of consultants who perform engineering design services. The OTA follows the QBS process in the procurement of engineering services consistent with the Oklahoma State law in Title 61. ACEC wants to take this opportunity to illustrate why QBS rather than low-bid is the well-established best practice.

About QBS
Qualifications-Based Selection (QBS) is a procurement process for engineering and architecture firms competing for work based on experience and technical expertise. Under QBS, firms are evaluated and shortlisted based on their qualifications, the top-ranked firm is selected for price negotiations. Ideally, a fair and reasonable price is reached based on a detailed scope of the project. If an agreement on price cannot be reached with the most qualified firm, negotiations move to the second most qualified firm. In most cases, the top-ranked firm is selected at a price that fits the client's budget.

A comprehensive academic study in 2022 found federal and state policies that select engineering services based on the design team's qualifications and experience had lower project costs and better on-time delivery versus selecting firms based on the cheapest bid.

Key Study Findings

- **QBS saves money** - projects where QBS was used to procure engineering services experienced less cost growth (3 percent) versus the national average (6 percent)
- **QBS saves time** - QBS projects perform better in terms of project delivery time, experiencing less schedule growth versus the national average (7 percent with QBS versus 10 percent without)
- **QBS produces higher levels of client satisfaction** - (89% of QBS projects receiving "high" or "very high" satisfaction ratings from project owners)
- **QBS promotes innovation** - Projects incorporating QBS have a greater likelihood of producing innovative solutions

The 2022 Study conducted on the 50th anniversary of the QBS law founded in 1972 in the Brooks Act clearly illustrates the benefits of this law. ACEC Oklahoma will continue to support the OTA's use of the QBS law in their selection of engineering firms. QBS Study