

Report Part IV. Increasing Efficiency and Other Recommendations

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Increasing Efficiency

The survey asked both public agencies and businesses what changes would make the small works roster process more effective. This survey question, alongside individual interviews, highlighted many efficiencies in the small works roster as well as efficiencies to the public works contracting process in general.

Small Works Roster

Public Agencies

102 public agency respondents answered the survey question *“What improvements do you think could be made to the small works roster process to make it more effective?”* Below are the common responses. The full list of responses is available in appendix A.

Decrease Requirements

Many respondents noted that there are many requirements (both for themselves and businesses) that can make the process burdensome: paperwork for prevailing wage, advertising requirements, the number of quotes required, etc.

- “In the last year, it has become more difficult to participate in public works contracting with the adoption of the mandatory training and recently certified payrolls. I would like to see

Washington adopt a similar program to Oregon where prevailing wage starts at projects over 50K.”

- “Remove the advertising requirement in the RCW. Allow Cities to take a minimum of two sealed bids and allow local contractors to remain on a list indefinitely (or at least for 3 to 5 year periods.”
- “The county would benefit by not making the process so time consuming - and on par with larger projects.”

Need more bidders/contractors in the pool

Public agency respondents highlighted that their rosters did not have enough contractors or, even if the list of contractors was long, did not have enough responsive bidders. This was especially true for rural areas, which see fewer respondents and fewer contractors willing to travel to their jobsites.

- “We operate in a very rural area and most times have to encourage contractors to get signed up.”
- “We don't seem to get much response from Roster contractors - unsure if that is because of outdated contact information or they are uninterested in our projects. I think it would be helpful to have alternate contact information or know when it was last updated.”
- “Rural communities struggle to hire contractors”

Better categorization

Public agencies found that many of their rosters don't have the correct category they need or that businesses register under the wrong category of work, making it difficult to find the correct businesses to advertise to.

- “Contractors and consultants registering for their actual field of expertise. Some seem to check a lot of boxes to be put into consideration for work.”
- “Prohibit contractors from indicating they do all kinds of work that they, in fact, are not interested in performing.”
- “Many of the contractors in a given category are not relevant to the project I want to advertise. We are hesitant to use the SWR because we think there would be better outreach advertising locally and in the DJC - Portland.”

Sort by Location/Region

Many respondents indicated that they wish they could sort businesses by their local or have a regional/location preference to local businesses.

- “Advertise locally when a small project that wouldn't interest contractors or vendors from across the state.”
- “List contractor specific to a location”
- “Regionalize the contractors, so that only contractors that could reasonable do the work without traveling great distance are on the list.”

Increase Threshold

Some respondents noted that the small works roster would be more efficient if the threshold was raised to a larger dollar amount. Some also noted that it would be more efficient to raise the minimum threshold for limited public works, as it is more efficient to finish projects in-house.

- “Increase dollar limit for both small works and limited public works”
- “Increase the value of materials level for work we can do ourselves instead of contracting out.”
- “Increase the threshold so it can be used more often.”

Increase Marketing/Outreach

Some respondents noted that the small works roster could be more efficient if there was more marketing and outreach to contractors to get listed. This is likely a similar sentiment to those who mentioned a lack of contractors and a desire to see more responsible bidders on the list.

- “More information and flexibility to market projects to contractors. It is unclear how to find contractors interested in certain projects.”
- “Having different avenues of reaching out to contractors to invite them to bid on small works contracts would make the process more effective.”
- “Increase outreach to contractors and particularly WMBE contractors and suppliers.”

Other Recommendations

Many other recommendations were made that are difficult to categorize or only mentioned once or twice in the comments received. These recommendations include: better automation of the small works roster process, extend the eligibility time of a businesses once registered, quality control of business information, etc.

18 respondents (17%) mentioned that they did not have any efficiencies to share or thought the current process worked well.

Businesses

52 business respondents answered the survey question “*What change or improvements do you think could be made to the public works contracting process to make it more effective?*” Below are the common responses. The full list of responses is available in appendix #.

Too much paperwork/reduce requirements

Many businesses noted the amount of paperwork or various requirements were too burdensome and they did not have enough time to view and complete the paperwork and requirements for bids. Respondents also noted that the current requirements system puts a lot of burden and risk onto contractors, which makes projects more expensive.

- “duplication, streamline and reduce the amount of paperwork needed. Having to do duplicate certified payrolls. Eliminate LCP Tracker. One on one training and education. More advance notice on pre bid walk throughs. More time to review RFQs and put together bid”
- “simplified paper work”
- “A reduction in the required paperwork would always be helpful. Also, risk equates to opportunity for the contractor but it drives up the contractor's cost. Consider having agencies

deal with risk. For example, with traffic control - instead of going lump sum and dumping all risk on contractor, either itemize traffic control or make it force account with a set amount.”

Lack of information and data transparency

Businesses would like to see more data transparency (who bid, who won a reward, etc.) and more information before submitting a bid proposal to a public agency. Some are not sure how to stand against other bidders and have trouble understanding what they should be doing to be more competitive in the future. There is also a lack of information in terms of how to view and bid on available work and businesses want to be more aware of the opportunities in public works contracting.

- “transparency of submittals received - we'd like agencies to post the submittals they receive on projects and scoresheets. Some agencies don't do debriefs so having this transparency is helpful as our firm evaluates how to do better...”
- “More honesty between engineers and owner on project prior to bidding.”
- “Sponsor instructional classes on how to navigate the process and how to get information on available work”

Qualified vs. Lowest Bidder

Some respondents mentioned they would like to see a different approach to bidding that awarded to the best fit or more qualified bidder, not the lowest bidder on a project.

- “Not always accepting the lowest bid. We had an existing contract with PCLS and when it went out to bid there were 4 bids. The 3 highest bids were within 1% of each other and the lowest bid was 50% less and they accepted it.”
- “i think maybe to consider the bidders not necessarily the lowest one”
- “Eliminate the low bidder process and go with the best fit.”

Receive Payments/Release Retainage Faster

Some respondents mentioned that they would like to see faster payment on retainage and invoices as well as faster timelines for closing out a project. We also heard this concern in our interview process, where businesses, especially smaller businesses with less capital, mentioned that it can be difficult to continue or move on to the next project until they have received payment

- “Pay on invoices faster.”
- “The timeline of retainage is long standing, it would be nice that once we file our affidavit of wages and are approved that our retainage would be released that would make it nice for subcontractors”
- “Agency review time to close out project and release retainage”

Other Recommendations and Comments

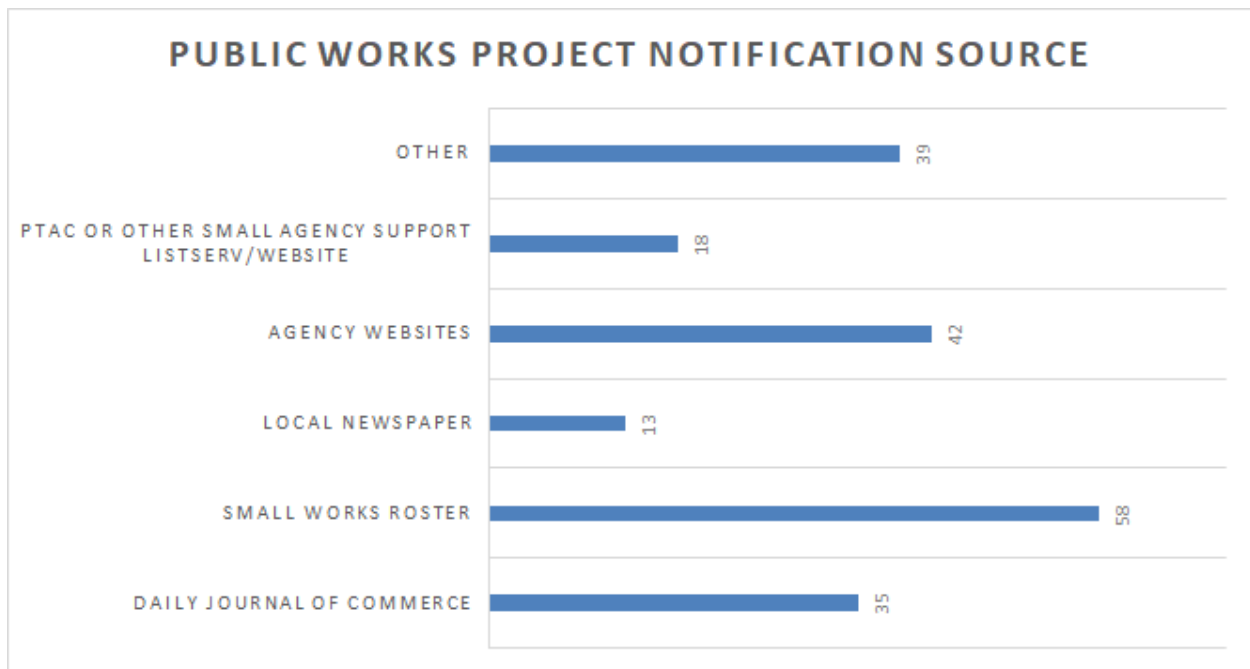
Many other recommendations were made that are difficult to categorize or only mentioned once or twice in the comments received. These recommendations included: longer timelines to submit bid proposals, increasing on-call contracting, and changing rules around work done by agency forces.

Other Efficiencies

Newspaper Requirements

During our interview phase we heard multiple public agencies express their desire to get rid of the newspaper specific advertising requirements for formal bid. Agencies mentioned that this would make the formal bid process less expensive and more efficient as newspaper deadlines mean that this process takes more time than posting on their own website, etc.. Some agencies also noted that they don't believe many businesses are getting information from the physical newspaper.

Due to this feedback, the survey asked businesses where they receive information for upcoming bids to understand if there is a reliance on the newspaper big notifications for businesses to see job opportunities.

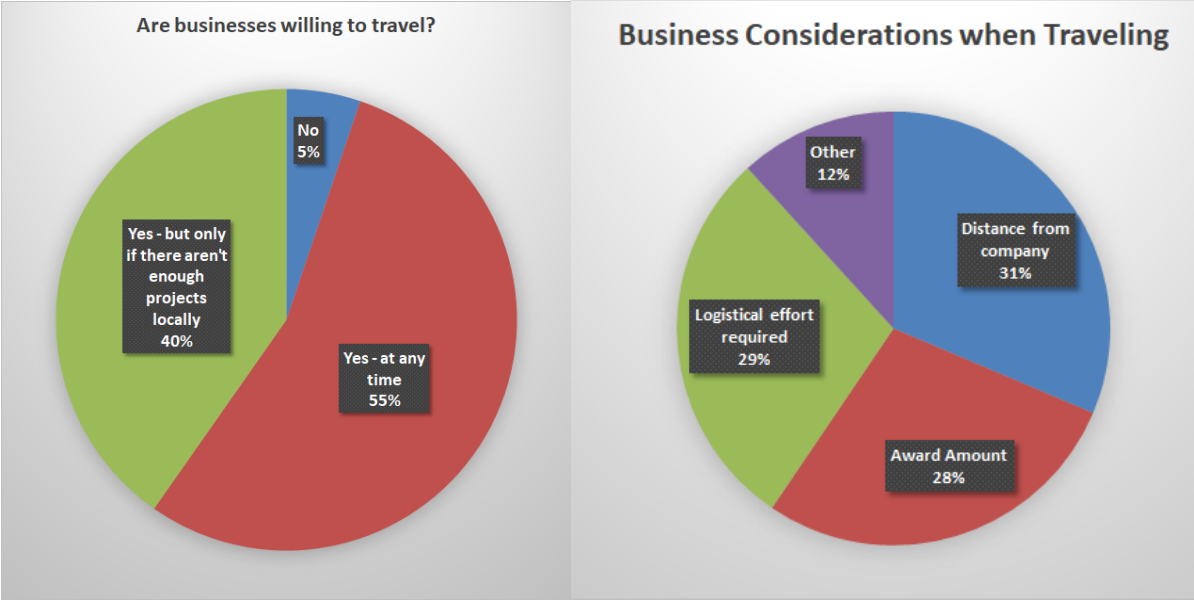


Only 13 respondents noted that they use the local newspaper to find job opportunities while the majority used the small works roster, individual agency websites and the daily journal of commerce. Other answers included invitations and direct contact from agencies and prime contractors. This was a multiple-choice question and the majority of respondents selected multiple options. Zero respondents only selected the local newspaper as a source of information. It is important to note that this survey was conducted over the internet and distributed through MRSC and partner business lists, meaning those who rely on the physical newspaper may have been under-represented.

Travel Incentives/Rural Location Incentives

During interviews and in the survey, rural agencies particularly mentioned the difficulty in getting responsive bidders to come do work in rural locations. Things like ferry costs and other travel expenses make bidders less eager to do work, according to public agencies. Agencies suggested creating travel incentives so contractors would be paid extra for their travel expenses.

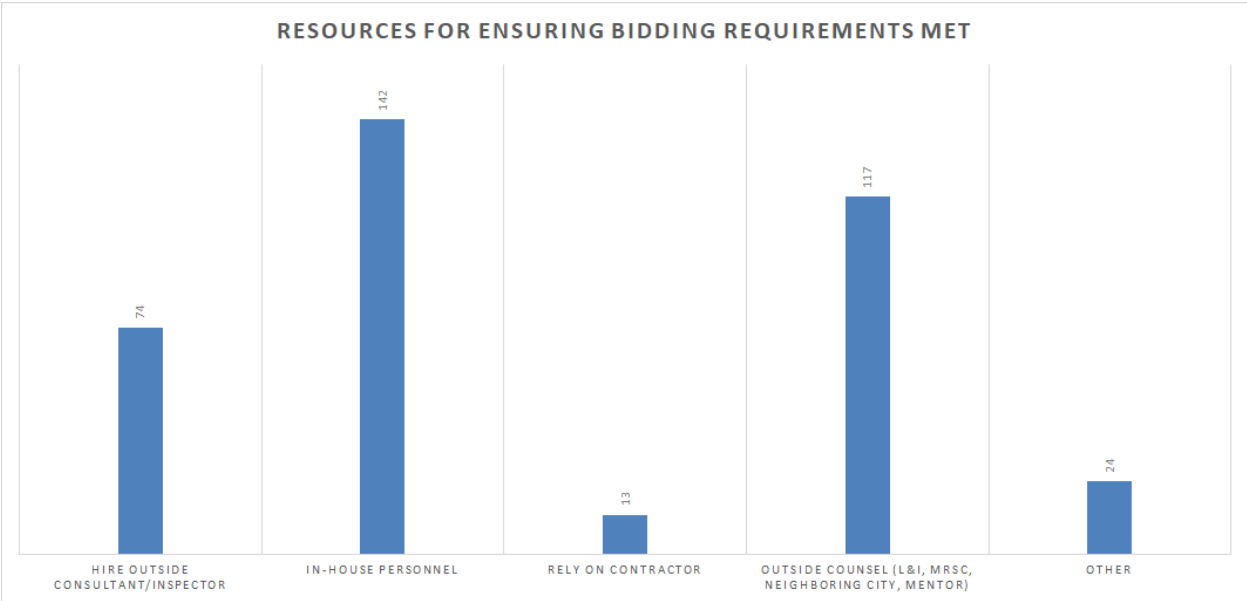
The survey asked businesses whether or not they would travel for work, and what considerations they would make when determining to bid on a project that would require travel.



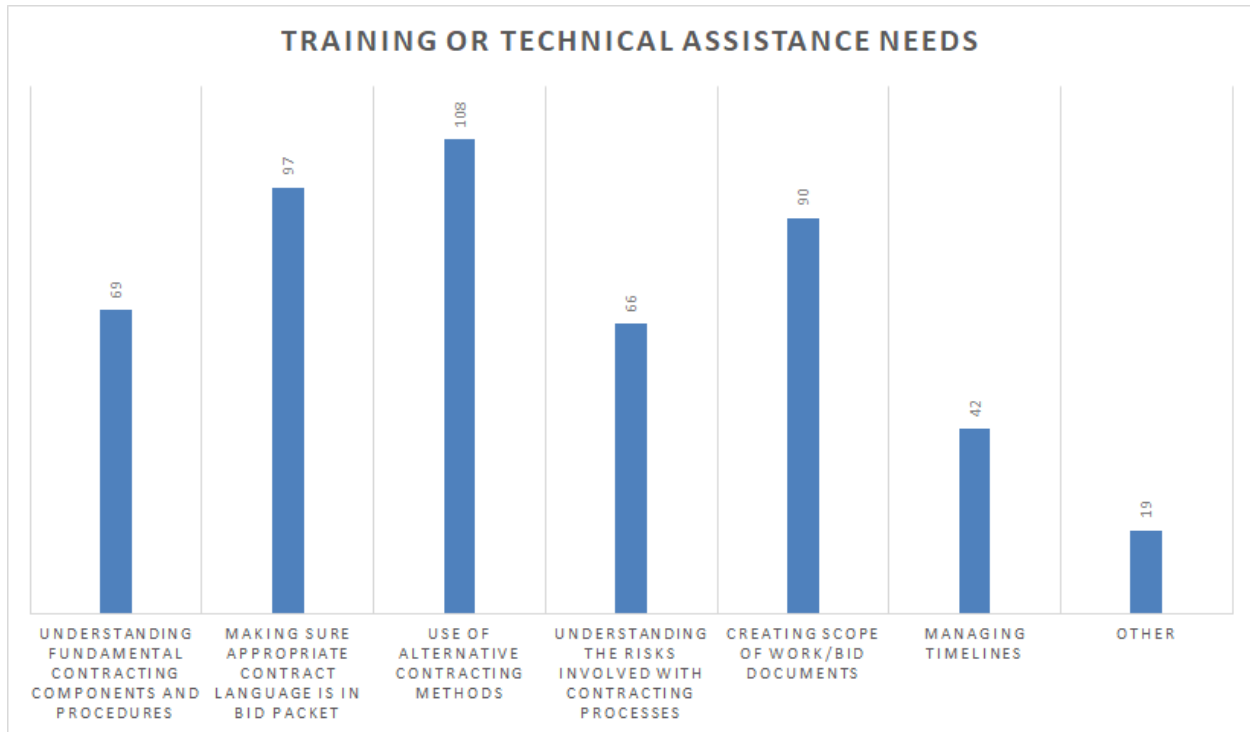
About half of respondents (55%) said they were willing to travel at any time for public works projects. The reasons for deciding to travel seem to split evenly between distance, effort and award amount. This likely means, confirming what we heard from rural agencies, that smaller projects, like those on the small works roster, that are far from urban centers are difficult to get contractors to bid on.

Training Opportunities for Public Works Staff

Public agencies noted in interviews that they wish there was more support for agencies when doing public works contracting. We asked public agencies what resources they currently use to ensure they are meeting all bidding requirements.



The majority of respondents listed in-house personnel and outside counsel resources as their source of knowledge on bidding requirements. Few respondents relied on their contractors. The survey also asked public agencies what training or technical assistance would be helpful moving forward.



The most popular responses were training on the alternative contracting methods, ensuring contracts have all appropriate language and assistance in creating scope of work and other bidding documents. In interviews, public agencies specifically identified their new ability to use unit price contracting as something they needed more training on.

Appendix

Appendix A. Public Agency Question: What improvements do you think could be made to the small works roster process to make it more effective?

Open-ended. 102 responses.

Decrease Requirements (L&I Training, Paperwork, Advertising etc.)

- In the last year, it has become more difficult to participate in public works contracting with the adoption of the mandatory training and recently certified payrolls. I would like to see Washington adopt a similar program to Oregon where prevailing wage starts at projects over 50K.
- Remove the advertising requirement in the RCW. Allow Cities to take a minimum of two sealed bids and allow local contractors to remain on a list indefinitely (or at least for 3 to 5 year periods).
- The amount of paperwork required on prevailing wage jobs seems to be the biggest complaint I hear about, and see.
- The county would benefit by not making the process so time consuming - and on par with larger projects.

- On smaller contracts sending to 3 contractors instead of 5 would be an improvement. It's hard to find 5 for specialty work sometimes.
- Reduce State requirements for reporting and prevailing wage.
- If the goal is to encourage small businesses, we need to make the requirements less burdensome. Like up to a certain threshold no prevailing wage requirements.
- Make process easier for small contractors to process, report small works.
- Perhaps L&I or other agency could collect small works roster t&c agreements once a year and then the t&c's could be eliminated from each individual contract. Way too much paperwork for small projects.
- decrease number of quotes required
- Raising contractor participation by eliminating the prevailing wage requirements.
- Keep it simple. The competitive spirit of the law is important, the continued addition of requirements and "streamlining" of certain processes makes it all the more difficult for small contractors to perform. They want to do the work called out in the job. Some of the smaller companies have no administrative help so they do the work to keep themselves whole and get behind in the paperwork, documentation and processing of files.
- Make it easier for the contractors and the agencies to do the paperwork. Faster response from State agencies to contractors can be paid timely.
- Make it easier for contractors to join the roster.
- Streamline the process so more contractors want to be a part of it.

Need more contractors Listed/Get more bidders on the list

- Not sure. I continue to give out the MRSC website for contractors to join, but we lack bidders on many of our bids.
- Not much in rural Washington
- Get more contractors signed up and interested in using it
- We operate in a very rural area and most times have to encourage contractors to get signed up.
- We don't seem to get much response from Roster contractors - unsure if that is because of outdated contact information or they are uninterested in our projects. I think it would be helpful to have alternate contact information or know when it was last updated.
- Rural communities struggle to hire contractors
- More local contractors; more contractors in general

Better Categorization

- Sometimes it is hard to find exactly what we are looking for. An example, I was looking for a graphic designer and I had to open many of the qualifications but still found it hard to find what I was looking for.
- Contractors and consultants registering for their actual field of expertise. Some seem to check a lot of boxes to be put into consideration for work.
- Prohibit contractors from indicating they do all kinds of work that they, in fact, are not interested in performing.
- Many of the contractors in a given category are not relevant to the project I want to advertise. We are hesitant to use the SWR because we think there would be better outreach advertising locally and in the DJC - Portland.
- Sometimes the mechanism by which we sort particular types of contractors or work is frustrating and doesn't bring up the contractors we need. Contractors may need more help in listing their area of expertise so they appear in the correct category/s
- Ensure the contractors are selecting the correct criteria to be put in the correct rosters.

- More efficient criteria match so that pulling a list of companies off the roster isn't so enormous. Narrow down the job needed so we don't have to contact 50 companies that pull up on the list when only 15 may offer the job we need completed.
- The biggest issue I encounter is contractors state they are provide every type of work, when that is not practical. If I need a fence, hundreds of contractors appear, when many of them are not at all interested in building a fence. Also, it would be nice to search by locale.

Sort by Location

- Include an option for sorting available firms by location (or at least by region). It takes a lot of time to wade through the list and eliminate firms that are outside of the Puget Sound area.
- Advertise locally when a small project that wouldn't interest contractors or vendors from across the state.
- Establish service area filters and remove general contractors from maintenance/repair, since they almost never bid on that type of work.
- List contractor specific to a location
- Regionalize the contractors, so that only contractors that could reasonable do the work without traveling great distance are on the list.
- enable initial searches to group contractors by distance from the job site location. Unless we download the data and sort it ourselves, we just see an alphabetical list of contractors who provide the services we select. Big pain.
- Have the contractors broken out by county.
- Get rid of it and just allow for us to post to our websites and allow bidders to bid - take away the legal ad and keep in the limits for bonds, retainage. But managing the roster when every contractor is on it anyways, seems like a waste of time.
- The ability to solicit from contractors within a certain mile range from our project location.
- Radius limits on allowed bidders. Local bidders tend to understand the costs associated with a particular area better than those, say "on the other side of the mountains"
- Ability to sort by location within State - West vs East etc. More info on qualifications of contractors or experience.
- Have contractors by region or county.
- Many contractors show up on our list that do not respond. It appears that many contractors are far away from us and may not be responding due to distance factors, so why show up on our list?
- Indicate location of contractor. Mobilization costs are make out-of-town/county contractors noncompetitive for most small works jobs.

Increase Thresholds

- Increase dollar limit for both small works and limited public works
- Increase the value of materials level for work we can do ourselves instead of contracting out.
- Increase the threshold so it can be used more often.
- Increase dollar ceiling, although the bigger players may take advantage
- Increase contract dollar thresholds
- Lower limit threshold increased above \$2,500.
- Raise limit
- I would like to see an increase in the minimum threshold for small works roster. I know it increased just last year. I could make the argument that it should be more in the neighborhood of \$75,000-\$100,000.
- To start with raise the public works limit. Raise the in house work limit to allow small projects to be performed in house. This would allow agencies to employ more staff and get more project completed. The State's infrastructure is in poor shape.

Increase Outreach/Advertising

- More information and flexibility to market projects to contractors. It is unclear how to find contractors interested in certain projects.
- Having different avenues of reaching out to contractors to invite them to bid on small works contracts would make the process more effective.
- Increase outreach to contractors and particularly WMBE contractors and suppliers.
- Advertise the small works roster to contractors
- Marketing to draw in local contractors into roster
- Most small contractors who want to perform public works contracts aren't aware of it.
- Being on the east side of the mountains has limitations, over time population growth will help to minimize this but maybe additional outreach to other contractors in the area could be of benefit if they exist.

Other Recommendations

- Define "equitable distribution"
- A better roster and significantly higher dollar amounts.
- Continue to encourage contractors to register on the roster bringing the agency better bid results; and continue to hone the category choices to fine tune for better bid results. Also require contractors to update their categories each year - since new ones are being added. This will also help get better bid results by reaching the correct contractors for the job.
- Make it applicable to all forms of PW contracting and eliminate the trade/non-SWR options.
- Would need to modify local policies to allow administrative award of SWR contracts rather having to go through a formal city council award process.
- Using the email contacts to advertise a Scope of Work quickly and efficiently helps greatly. I like the format of the SWR display and process.
- Create more of an automated process of sending out notices for solicitation to contractors on the roster. Right now users need to hunt through info pages for the appropriate contacts
- Some form of quality control or policing to keep addresses current. The roster tool is very robust but can use some updating and checking for bad email addresses. Could this be automated, done quarterly? I just did an advertisement to over 1000 contractors using the roster, got a small percentage of bouncebacks, but that can still overwhelm one's email.
- Consider that there are small state agencies with limited resources financially and personnel
- Categorize by certifications such as small and disadvantaged business. Now we have to go into the company's record to see what certifications they have
- Not require annual sign-ups. Make the sign-up good for 10 years.
- Also, to be able to solicit a quote (if your looking for a final one to meet the minimum requirement) from a Contractor/Vendor that is not on your roster however, is a licensed contractor that is considered responsible.
- Get rid of it.
- Mandate vendors submit at least three bids per year to remain on roster(s).
- A better (meaning both easier and more quickly) way of filtering the roster to meet my City's needs; not the system's needs.
- make towns accountable for justification of spending foolishly
- Available responsibility criteria, continued monitoring of contractor status
- If there was a way to get companies to have some sort of investment in the process. Maybe forcing them to reregister every year or two. Maybe dropping those vendors that haven't responded to an invitation in a year or two. Also, agencies should be able to remove vendors that fail to perform. We recently had a vendor "win" a Bid and then say no thanks we don't want to do that.

- Making sure contractors are able to self perform work or state that they are a general contractor, and have contractors identified by region they typically work in, so we do not end up trying to get bids for small works from contractors that are across the state and do not respond to our requests.
- Low end contracting needs to be updated and made easier for the \$5K - \$20K projects. Also, need greater detail on service/task order based contracting.
- Unsure why only limited contractors respond. A means to have 'registered' bidders would help to know who is interested in bidding the work. Otherwise all potential notices to bidders must involve an e-mail to all.
- Consistent bid requirements, doing away with the 3 v 5 bidder response requirements. Clear concise prevailing wage requirements based on the type of work being considered. More Small Works / Prevailing Wage webinar training available.
- A common statewide small works roster would be helpful. In Washington state, if L&I managed the roster, we could eliminate the step of vetting potential bidders through L&I for wage compliance and safety violations.
- We have a separate small works roster process than MRSC. Several years ago when we were using the MRSC roster, we were told by the state auditor that we could offer a small works project to any 5 contractors on our list rather than go through our 212 contractors that were on our small works roster from the MRSC. However, the next time we used the small works roster, we could not use any of the first 5 contractors we use previously. And so on, until we went through the entire list. Many of the contractors on the MRSC small works contractor list did not even work remotely close to our area. We want to use contractors that want to work with us and therefore, dropped out of MRSC and are managing our own small works roster. Unfortunately, we have only had one project we have done since we left MRSC but we hope to do more and intend to send out all projects to all contractors on our small works contractor list.
- A lot of the vendors on any given list are not really qualified for the specific work we are looking for. There is a lot of time wasted figuring out which vendor to submit a RFP to.
- Small Works tend to be more expensive than a simple bid request
- Develop a way to thin the pool of bidders,
- Add a provision that includes all very small special purpose districts that is realistic for rural america.
- Extend the time period of eligibility once on the small works roster.

No Improvements Noted/Works Well as is

- I think it's fine but that's just my opinion :)
- Cannot think of any at this time
- Not sure (3)
- Haven't really used it yet
- No changes
- Unknown (2)
- We are very pleased with the process as supported by MRSC.
- Not sure what can be done to improve it.
- None at this time.
- I'm not sure. We are packaged with other communities/agencies in our area which tends to maximize the potential for contractors, it may be a lack of awareness.
- The small works roster process works really well for our city.
- None (2)
- As STA has not been able to go through the process I cannot provide an opinion on this.
- I think it works pretty well

Appendix B. Business Question: What change or improvements do you think could be made to the public works contracting process to make it more effective?

Open-ended. 54 comments.

Relax Requirements/Paperwork

- remove prevailing wage. some bidder responsibility criteria could be eliminated, i.e., apprenticeship training, prevailing wage training
- These answers are for Design only: The RFQ/SOQ process is terrible, too much bureaucracy within agencies to get projects done efficient and in the public interest
- simpler filing for intents and affidavits
- duplication, streamline and reduce the amount of paperwork needed. Having to do duplicate certified payrolls. Eliminate LCP Tracker. One on one training and education. More advance notice on pre bid walk throughs. More time to review RFQs and put together bid
- Less paperwork
- simplified paper work
- Simple paper work
- Mechanics,delivery drivers,truck drivers should be except from prevailing wage laws. Alought of times these are needed in emergent situations and availability
- I think that for a small company such as ours, it would be beneficial to raise the limit of a combined intent and affidavit to \$4,000.00 instead of the \$2500.00 limit currently in place.
- less paper work, they prevailing wages are a joke it is a corrupt system to give work to unions
- Change the focus from convenience to Lnl to convenience to contractors.
- A reduction in the required paperwork would always be helpful. Also, risk equates to opportunity for the contractor but it drives up the contractor's cost. Consider having agencies deal with risk. For example, with traffic control - instead of going lump sum and dumping all risk on contractor, either itemize traffic control or make it force account with a set amount.
-

Go with most qualified, not lowest bidder

- More qualification-based selections - ideally a mix of cost and qualifications - similar to more private sector projects.
- More structure around the QBS (qualifications based selection) process for consulting
- Not always accepting the lowest bid. We had an existing contract with PCLS and when it went out to bid there were 4 bids. The 3 highest bids were within 1% of each other and the lowest bid was 50% less and they accepted it.
- i think maybe to consider the bidders not necessarily the lowest one
- Eliminate the low bidder process and go with the best fit.

Better flow of information/More Information Available to Contractors

- transparency of submittals received - we'd like agencies to post the submittals they receive on projects and scoresheets. Some agencies don't do debriefs so having this transparency is helpful as our firm evaluates how to do better. - Insurance limits - some agencies are requiring higher and higher insurance limits, which are very costly for Small Business firms to obtain. The staff at agencies driving risk management need to understand the implications and effects of its risk aversion practices on consulting firms, then work towards a happy medium.
- More honesty between engineers and owner on project prior to bidding.
- Sponsor instructional classes on how to navigate the process and how to get information on available work
- Have someone readily available to answer questions

- A workshop or tutorial guiding through the initial bidding process.
- Easier access to all jobs that get listed. Make it easy and put them all in one place
- Updating product data to current availability and efficiency.
- One place online we're I can find public work jobs.
- a bidding list, planholders list of contractors.
- knowledge of needs, clear understanding of prevailing wage and various other contract needs.
- Documentation needs to be clear, concise, easily understood. There's repetitive information, conflicting directions, too much legal ease text. Many companies feel it just takes more effort than its worth.
- Allow a more open bidding process with better more communication with customer
- The budget for these projects are not always stated in the request for bids.
- When posting a project, make it a requirement to post job location, so we don't have to open several documents to see the job is out of our normal work area.
- Only include in RFP what is applicable to the specific project at hand.
-

Receive Payment/Release Retainage Faster

- Pay on invoices faster.
- The time line of retainage is long standing, it would be nice that once we file our affidavit of wages and are approved that our retainage would be released that would make it nice for subcontractors
- Agency review time to close out project and release retainage
- Administrative burdens and slow pay issues.

Other Comments

- I think the processes that are in place are working effectively. I like that everything is done electronically.
- Many public works owners rely on PLAs or CWAs, which typically hurt and create barriers for small businesses. I recommend adding language to these documents that would exempt MWDBEs.
- Remove contradictions that "require no discrimination" while requiring preference (discrimination) for certain racial, gender, etc.
- break out subs work for newly engineered or emerging green products vendors
- Continuing efforts for Partnering between Agencies & Contractors Reduce administrative burden
- Allow ultra small firms to bill using an all inclusive fully loaded billing rate. Eliminate the need for ultra small firms to calc ICR annually.
- Reduced turn-around timelines for contract execution; public/private agreement on Indemnification clauses
- Increase number of pre-qualified on-call/IDIQ contracts to reduce number of time consuming of RFQ/SOQ exercises for individual projects
- County and State Road Maintenance Crews and Organizations having to play by the same rules as the private sector and quite competing against the private sector for work. Such as the Washington State TIB funds, local County workers performing street maintenance work on City streets not paying prevailing wages, not having their work inspected, not being held to the same standard as the Private Contractors.
- I like public works projects as everyone bidding is held to the same criteria. The labor cost are the same for the same for all. They are easy to bid on.
- Requirements for agencies to always provide accurate taxability information at bid and/or contract submission. Too often it is up to the contractor to hunt down this info.

- So far our experience has been good. We only had 1 project that we had to cancel because the city had a ridiculous timeline for completion. We had other jobs that were ahead of theirs and they were unwilling to change the completion date. The project was not done for another 7 months. If they had been willing to change completion date by 3 weeks, our company would have saved the city \$15,000.00
- Longer bid timeline
- Search for local SDVOB
- When your company has done a few of these jobs, the contracting process is ok, it's after you get these jobs and the Contractor or Company that your work for can become a real nightmare.
- Get rid of "buy american" clause. very difficult to find materials or components that are only made in USA anymore, and they are more expensive, drive up job costs.

No Comment

- N/A (2 commenters)
- None