

# Featured Article: The 5 Worst Mistakes You Can Make On Your RFP For Land Surveying Services

By Landon Blake

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## Introduction

In this article, I'll review 5 of the worst mistakes you can make when preparing a request-for-proposal for professional land surveying services. I'll also make a few suggestions on how to avoid these mistakes. The principles in this article apply to request-for-proposals in both the public sector and private sector. But, this I wrote this article primarily with the public-sector request-for-proposal in mind.

## Mistake #1: Making The Requirements for Special Treatment of Workers Unclear

The most common mistake I see in a request-for-proposal is the failure to clearly state requirements for the special treatment of workers.

Organizations often have special requirements for the treatment of workers. These special requirements usually apply to projects the organization funds, oversees. The requirements can also apply based on the location of the project. What type of special requirements are we talking about? They could be any of the following:

The requirement to pay an hourly rate above the "normal" or market rate. In many places, people know of this practice as the payment of "prevailing wages."

## Article Summary

Government agencies in the United States hire consultant land surveyors to provide surveying. This is often less expensive than maintaining and in-house surveying department.

Government agencies publish a request-for-proposal (RFP) for surveying services for specific projects. These requests-for-proposals are frequently unclear and contain errors. The mistakes make it difficult for consulting land surveyors to properly respond to the RFP.

In this article we discuss 5 of the most common mistakes public agencies make in an RFP for land surveying services.

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The requirement to provide special equipment or extra workers on the job site.

Restrictions on work shifts length or time of day.

The requirement to have special training or security clearance.

I often see this mistake made with the need to pay workers on a project prevailing wages. This need should be clearly stated in the request-for-proposal. The agency should determine if the payment of prevailing wages is required. They shouldn't ask the surveyor to do this. (I'll talk more about the payment of prevailing wages in a future article.)

### **Mistake #2: Asking for a "Bid."**

The second most common mistake I see in a request-for-proposal is asking for a "bid." This often happens when an ignorant person in the purchasing department or public works department copies bid request documents used for construction contractors. Quality land surveying firms that are providing a professional service immediately think the following three things when they see a request for a "bid":

1) The agency requesting the bid has a total lack of understanding about why land surveying is a professional service and not a commodity.

2) The agency will award this work to the lowest bidder. They will only pay lip service to consideration of the bidder's professional reputation, approach to the project,

"Government agencies often fail to clearly state if prevailing wages are required on surveys for a project. This need to pay (or not pay) these wages should be clearly stated in the request-for-proposal.

The government agency should determine if the payment of prevailing wages is required. They shouldn't ask the surveyor to do this.

The consultant land surveyor doesn't have the information about the funding sources or other details of the project that are needed to determine if prevailing wages should be paid on a project. The government agency does.)"

or the quality of their work.

3) The agency is either ignorant about the laws requiring qualifications based selection for professional land surveying services, or they choose to ignore them. Neither ignorance or lack of respect for the law is a quality you look for in a good client.

Before I move on to Mistake #3, I'd like to point out that asking for your bid in a separate sealed envelope doesn't do anything to change the perception of potential responders to your request-for-proposal. All it does is:

1) Waste an envelope.

2) Tell the land surveyor your trying to be dishonest about the real factor you will use to select your consultant: a low price.

### **Mistake #3: Having Unclear Mapping Limits**

A land surveyor can't correctly estimate the cost or effective approach to a land survey without a good understanding of the mapping limits. You always need to include a sketch that shows the mapping limits. Make sure you or show on the sketch any off-site improvements or easements you want the surveyor to locate. A street address or a tax assessor parcel number is not a suitable description of the project mapping limits. Neither is a simple listing of linear feet along a street or other route.

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If you aren't sure what the mapping limits need to be for your project, work with a surveyor to figure it out. Or, as an alternative, ask for suggested mapping limits from the surveyor as part of your request-for-proposal.

### **Mistake #4: Not Considering Property Access Requirements**

Coordination of access to private property as part of a survey is a nightmare. The requirement to coordinate access to private property can also greatly increase the cost of the survey.

A land surveyor can take care of this as part of their scope-of-services, but it isn't what they are good at. Most surveyors also don't like to do it. You need to consider the requirement to access private property on every survey request-for-proposal you release. If access to private property is required, make sure you do the following in the request-for-proposal:

- 1) Make it clear who is primarily responsible for private property access.
- 2) Make it clear what property access coordination support your agency will provide if any.
- 3) Make it clear how the land surveyor should handle land owners that repeatedly deny access.
- 4) Make it clear how the land surveyor is to prove they

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received permission to access private property.

In my experience, it isn't a good idea for the public agency to wash their hands of private property access coordination. This is usually an effort the agency legal counsel, and public outreach team should handle in cooperation with the land surveyor.

Note: Access to military installations, private corporation property, freeways, airports, and railroads is especially difficult. Talk to a land surveyor about options for surveying these areas remotely if needed for your project.

### **Mistake #5: Requesting an Unclear Scope of Services**

The scope-of-services you ask for in your request-for-proposal will control the fee estimate and schedule your land surveyor prepares. It will also determine the type of work product you receive. It is critical that your requested scope-of-services be clear.

The land surveyor can't satisfy you with their professional services if you request an unclear scope-of-services. If your requested scope-of-services is ambiguous, you are setting up your consultant for failure.

It is difficult to write a scope-of-services that are easily understood. This is especially true if you aren't a land surveyor. Land surveyors trusted by a public agency can help determine what items to include in a requested

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scope-of-services.

A requested scope-of-services that are poorly written will also lead to more requests for change orders during the survey. This is a bad deal for all parties involved. You don't like getting requests for change orders, and I don't like sending them to you. Help us both avoid that unpleasantness with a clear scope.

If you don't turn away quality professional land surveyors with a request for a "bid" in your request-for-proposal, you can just as easily do it with a requested scope-of-services that are poorly written.

### Conclusion

In this article, we reviewed 5 of the worst mistakes you can make in a land surveying request-for-proposal. How do you avoid these mistakes?

- 1) Make requirements for special treatment of workers clear. This includes the need to pay workers prevailing wages.
- 2) Don't ask for a "bid." Land Surveyors are professionals, and we want you to treat us like it. Don't try to fool us with that "secret envelope" nonsense either. We know what you are doing.
- 3) Make the mapping limits clear. Include a good exhibit!
- 4) Think about how your land surveyor will need to

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access the private property as part of the survey you are requesting.

5) Request a clear scope-of-services.

In a future article, I'll talk about three more mistakes I commonly see in requests for surveying services.