



## **Best Practices for landscaping: Maintenance, Irrigation, and Water Management.**

As the seasons turn the corner from winter to spring, it is vital to begin preparations for your summer landscaping needs and projects. Knowing your exact landscape needs and preparing to budget for those needs is the first step in creating a practical, understandable, and directed RFP. (Requests for proposal). Sourcing and selecting a partner, or partners, to provide your business locations with top level service is a critical initiative, and must be designed, charted, planned, and plotted.

### **PLANNING:**

To deliver a proper RFP that can be competitively bid on by vendor partners is vital to the success of the RFP and the project. The goal of the RFP is to select the most qualified partner for your needs. All of your company's objectives must be clearly identified in the RFP process. Creating apples to apples RFP's removes miss communication and provides accountability for the company requesting the RFP.

### **RFP GOALS:**

- Determine an exact scope of work for each location.
- Identify the square footages of work to be performed.
- By determining the biddable square footages RFP bidding errors can be omitted and you are protected against inflated or under measured landscape areas.
  - Identify the square feet of beds and turf areas for each landscape space as this will be the biggest expense in the RFP and where the price is derived from.
  - Identify any broken irrigation or damaged plants which may to be replaced.



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- Identify the amount of fertilizer which must be applied to the landscape space to keep the turf and shrubs areas full and healthy
- Having an engineer's estimate created prior to sending out the RFP will insure costs will be controlled and your company will be protected from price gouging.
- Having engineers estimates broken down by region to reflect work style and cost of living for particular areas this will provide a safety net for your company and will provide transparent accountability across the board.
- The engineers estimate will give you a valuation of the services before bidding and will protect you from sticker shock. It will give you a target of where the numbers need to be and will help you weed out underbidding contractors and overpriced contractors.
- Creating a line itemed bid sheet and identifying partner square footage pricing will be extremely valuable in comparing like quotes and identifying possible change order costs before the arise.
- Know what you want to pay before you pay it.
- Look for a company with technological advancement in tracking and recording work performed.
- Set standards to insure all work is complete.
- Creating a site map with the exact requirement of the project is a must in receiving apples to apples quote.

### **SCOPE OF WORK:**

The success of the RFP will be derived from the detail in the scope of work and RFP requirements. Identifying your needs and putting plans in place that reduce cost overages is crucial to your RFP initiative. Understanding cost overages, and that having your landscape space professionally maintained reduces trash and debris around landscape beds, reduces transient habitation behind shrubs and



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hedges and provides safety for clients. Landscaping also provides curb appeal and attracts clients to your locations. The cost of landscaping depending on where you are across the United States varies from region to region. The cost of a consistent maintenance plan is far more cost effective than quarterly clean ups, or servicing only when needed. Putting plans in place which call progressive scheduled landscape maintenance services will reduce your overhead costs. A project which calls for turf replacement because the turf has been neglected is far more expensive than consistent fertilization. Ensuring that your scope of work includes, maintenance, irrigation, aerating, thatching, fertilization, pruning, and backflow testing will help eliminate unforeseens and will produce a cost which is on budget.

Setting the standard in your scope of work is vital. Identifying your exact cost is crucial to minimizing project cost overruns. Identifying project material types and quantities provides accountability across the board. The scope of work should be as clear and concise as possible. Implementing predetermined materials, quantities, mixtures, manufacture specifications, and work flows will prevent inadequate materials or installation methods from being utilized by partner vendors. Thus raising the bar and setting the standard for the work which will take place on your properties. This will also enhance the curb appeal of the project as each location will have the same quality of materials and workmanship provided by partner vendors.

#### **TIMELINES:**

Once all of the information has been gathered and the RFP is ready for release it is important to set realistic time line for the vendor partners you have chosen to prepare and adequate proposal. Most companies will have feet on the ground at each location verifying square footages and reviewing the areas for potential pit falls. While most companies use a mixture of technology and feet on the ground bidding strategies to determine their final price it is imperative they have the time



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they need to provide adequate proposals. A range of 3 to 6 weeks should be allotted from the date of RFP release to the final bid opening. This is a common time frame for portfolios that number locations in the thousands.

By allowing partners to thoroughly review the sites they are bidding on, costly mistakes can be avoided by rushing proposals. It is never in your best interest to make a rushed decision. It is better if needed, to extend the RFP date, or to take longer than expected to making a final vetting decision. Finding the right partner can save thousands in a rushed decision.

Once the right partner has been vetted and the project awarded a 30 day implementation time should be allowed to properly set the project in place. The projects should then be scheduled sequentially as their needs require. It is key to start the process of the RFP early enough to make sure your partner vendors can provide the work in the predetermined time frame. Because landscape work is extremely sensitive to weather requirements having the right plan in place will save thousands in scheduling conflicts and issues. Scheduling too late or too early in the season can have adverse effects.

#### **THE RFP:**

Creating the RFP is a key to getting the project started right. Make sure the RFP template is straight forward and simple to read.

It is important that all pertinent site information is included in the RFP packet. This includes addresses and scope of work for each location. This should also include a site contact to touch base with in case there are any site specific restrictions or needs that may not be transposable in the RFP packet. An example would be having detailed information as to where the irrigation controller is inside the building, where the automatic shut off valve is, where the backflow preventer is



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located. These are all items that should be located on site. Many times managers do not know exactly where these items are located.

Every piece of the project comes at a cost. But by being prepared and having an easy to use, straight forward, concise RFP thousands of dollars can be saved. When using a RFP properly you can adequately budget and prepare for the needed services for years to come. Your dollars can be maximized and you will know exactly where they are going. One thing to also keep in mind is that the lowest bid price often comes at the highest cost. Under bidding can result in removing an under qualified contractor and having to taken costly steps backwards in the process and possibly not meeting the project expectations by the time the weather has turned back to fall, leaving the project incomplete, and a year behind, affecting next year's budgeting process.

### **REGIONAL VARIABLES**

Many companies have portfolios that cross North America. What this means is that each region will have different requirements and accommodations. Heat is always a variable and rain is always a problem.

The challenge can be meeting the requirements of each of your locations within the proper time frame. In the South West Markets it is important to have the winter rye included in your bidding process. It is also important to have additional clean-ups in place during the Monsoon season which starts midsummer to early fall. In the West Coast markets there are many challenges for example in Washington especially the Seattle area scheduling can be challenging due to the heavy rains throughout the year. This can cause unstable soils and irrigation monitoring late into the summer season. In San Francisco there are cooler temperatures but not to the affect that you would hold landscape services. In this market you will be servicing 52 times per season. In the East Coast the landscape season can be affected by cooler than normal temperatures, in New York for example landscape



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season will only extend 8 months. The winters are so cold that the landscape is dormant for the winter season and service is not needed.

Traditionally landscape maintenance work occurs when during the summer, but for brands that have a nation presence it is important to know how many services per season you will need to maintain your landscape spaces. Here are some examples

Seattle – 36 service per year

Portland – 36 services per year

Los Angeles – 52 services per year

Phoenix – 52 services per year

Dallas – 52 services per year

Chicago – 32 services per year

New York – 32 services per year

The best way to manage your landscape services is by weather region. In some states there may be several regions in other cases there may be weather regions which cover several states. Working with a proven vendor partner can help identify these landscape specific regions. In many cases a RFI (request for information) may be released to vendor partners up to a year in advance to gain area specific knowledge of areas requiring specific treatment or service. This valuable information can then be used in creating the RFP. It can be reviewed by stake holders, regional managers, corporate staff, and facility managers. This information helps your facility team to make educated decisions regarding the regional projects. They can remove items out of the particular project budgets by region, state, or market. This will help your company deliver an RFP that is designed to fit your needs for years to come.



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**WATER MANAGEMENT – IRRIGATION**

The largest expense with your landscape service will be irrigation. It is vital to have water control plans in place. Ensuring you have plans in place to repair broken pipes, and heads is key to the initiative. Having water management and conservation plans in place to protect water consumption during summer rains and summer droughts is also extremely important to the water management program. Water can come at an extremely high price, but also a key to an appealing location. Ensure you have thoroughly reviewed the sustainability program you are including in your RFP process.

**SCHEDULE:**

A schedule to store managers should also be developed and should include customer and employee parking areas as well as any scheduled delivery dates. Store lighting times should be adjusted and scheduled for early morning services if required. In some cases store light are turned off after a certain time, and those lights may be imperative to completing the repair on schedule.

For proper implementation and a successful RFP to take place site plans and must be accurate. This provides an environment that will breed project success. This helps to minimize the project impact and maximize the brands goals and objectives.

**CLOSING**

A successful best-in class project will consist of the following components.

- Detailed RFP.
- Properly vetted and awarded partner vendor.





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- Proper project planning and scheduling.
- Proper field management
- Weather monitoring
- Adapting to scheduling changes due to weather constraints.
- Project communication
- Proper project close outs and finalizations.

Weekly service updates are important to a large landscape production. The more engaged in the daily progress of the project the more successful the project will be. Open communication allows you to report on exactly where the status of the service or repair and where it is going. As they say “knowledge is power.”

Understanding the time table and scope of work set out before your partner vendor is a key to the success. Working together with open lines of communication and strategy will produce greater results than you could ever expect. Appointing key points of contact will prove invaluable and will be a blueprint for the success of the project.

As we bring this best practices piece to an end, please consider: What servicing model are you moving from or transitioning to? If your current model is by location based or if you are moving from one national provider to another to another there are many critical functions to consider in this process. Once you have chosen a vetted vendor partner it is their responsibility to provide a comprehensive project management plan. It is also their responsibility to complete the RFP to the end, whatever that takes and entails.

Once you have created an RFP and implemented the Best Practices that fit your organizational needs you have positioned your company for a successful RFP. Once the projects have been awarded it is up to the expertise of your vendor partner to position themselves to succeed and use their business policy and





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procedures to bring the project through implementation to completion. Choosing the right partner is crucial to this final success.

Choosing the right partner with the right experience can save your company up to 30% of project costs and costs associated with the project. Some of those attributes which allow you to harness such savings are the use of modern technology, scheduling and logistics, project management tracking, project and field management, billing, point of contact, project completion, and close out. Choosing a company without these attributes can be disastrous and these potential savings can be lost and the cost of the project can actually become more than what was originally budgeted. This can cause a loss of credibility for all parties. Before you make your final vendor partner selection make sure they are the best fit for your company and you have the confidence they can deliver on the RFP you have designed and implemented.

By implementing some of these best practices you will give your company commanding control over your RFP and the costs associated with the project. By staying the course your company will end up in the position you want it to be in. Your stake holders and corporate officers will be pleased with the outcome and you will guarantee a much better chance of sourcing and delivering a successful landscape RFP program. Good luck this spring season with your RFPS and invitations.

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