



Be certain all bidding is the same. Will the contractor raise the clay level? Will they remove the sod and lower the surrounding lip to solve the problem? They won't know unless you tell them. (L to R): Ken Gregory from Sports Turf One and Marshall Jennings from Jupiter Stadium.

Value bidding:

assembling, receiving and analyzing competitive bids for field construction

By Dell Haverland

I have often wondered why so many public and private sports field projects have failed to produce good work and value for the end user. Over the years I began to realize that many projects produce unsatisfactory results because of poor preparation of the pre-bid documents, plans and specifications. This is especially true on public work because so much emphasis is put on the legalese. The hundreds of pages of boilerplate language may keep purchasing people and their lawyers happy, but it only serves to dwarf the scope of the work. It is almost as though the project itself can become secondary and inconsequential.

I recently received plans for a new park with ball fields. The three spec books *each* weighed more than 60 pounds, along with three sets

of plans weighing even more. And yet the documents pertaining to the actual scope of construction were merely a few standard pages of State Department of Transportation specifications for the grassing of roadways.

Another special section made several references about sports field construction with very vague stipulations about soil and turf. This situation forces the bidder to make assumptions and requires him/her to bid from those assumptions.

Similarly the civil plans for this project were contradictory, with bits of information on the landscaping pages, the paving and drainage section, and a little more in the "SP" section. This entire bid package was built from cut and paste pieces from past projects

with little or no thought given to this particular site. There was absolutely no regard at all for the end user and maintenance. It was obvious that the Parks & Recreation people had not participated in the preparation of these plans.

The engineers and their consultants are probably capable of doing a great job of building the roads, but it is clear that this park's sports fields would be a catastrophe; poor layout, poor soil specifications, poor turf planning, poor dugout design, poor drainage and the poor, poor taxpayer who has to pay for this park! Unfortunately, down the road, the taxpayer will pay again and again to fix the future troubles this park will encounter. This is not a unique project and yet my colleagues tell me the problem is quite common not only here in Florida, but across the nation.

Smaller renovation projects have similar problems as well. For instance, if you were the park manager of an existing ball field, it should be simple to get a price on laser grading the skinned areas, right? Not so. When contractors are left to their own devices, even something this simple can become a disaster. The less experienced contractors don't understand how much work is needed, so they plan for less work and bid the work at a cheaper price. If you don't say you need it, they probably won't include it. And the majority of decision makers who examine these bids have no field experience, so they jump on the cheaper price. It is extremely important

for any project big or small to be bid with the proper scope, including concise specifications on appropriate forms, determining the *best value* not the best price is achieved. How is this accomplished?

Let's start with a basic outline for achieving a good and competitive bid:

THE GOAL—Outline the goal of the project, e.g., "The goal of this project is for the complete renovation of four football fields to improve drainage, playability and safety."

To achieve this, the contractor is to remove the existing turf, install a completely new irrigation system, provide soil amendments, laser grading and install new Celestial Green turfgrass.

Where did "the goal" come from? How was it decided? Typically the athletes, coaches or players' families will complain about conditions. Those complaints travel to the right ears and a call is made to the park manager. "We need to get some prices on renovation the fields." The people in the Parks Dept. already know about most of the problems and understand people's expectations. Meetings are held and out of these meetings develop "the goal."

The project goal is important for two reasons. Number one of course is so that people authorizing money for the project as well as the bidders are aware of what is expected. Secondly, and not as obvious, it is a means to get all parties on the same page.

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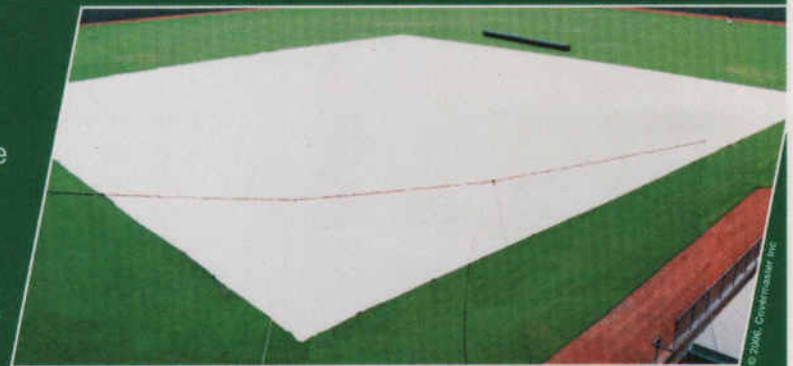
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From the complete renovation at Roger Dean Stadium in Jupiter FL, spring home of the Marlins and the Cardinals. This shot shows the new Celebration bermuda turf just after installation during the first topdressing. If you look closely you can see the guy in motion putting out the 90/10 USGA mix. Picture taken by Sports Turf One VP Bill Gillan; pilot was Dell Haverland.

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It is not uncommon for projects to go off track and turn into something else. For instance, our company once bid a golf course project several times to a private country club. The original intent was to improve the playability of the golf course to attract new members. After several of the key committee members moved on, the focus of the remaining committee turned the job into a landscaping project with no improvement of the golf course whatsoever and no new membership.

THE SCOPE—Determine the scope of the project and specifications. The goal above was an overview. Now it's time to be more specific. Hire an engineer who specializes in sports field construction to develop plans and specifications. The engineer must be interviewed, visit the site, and be included in all meetings so that he or she is on the same page as everyone else. "If we don't have funds for an engineer or consultant, how do we accomplish this?"

On smaller projects where an engineer may not be needed, the turf manager can ask sports field contractors in the area to come down to the site for a "walk & talk." Try to get contractors with local knowledge that specialize in the type of work for this

particular project. Walk the site and ask for their opinions and recommendations for the renovation. If the contractor can provide a budgetary bid proposal from the visit, so much the better. Let each contractor do the measuring and provide his scope and quantities. You will both learn from this experience and it will give you an idea of each contractor's experience and integrity. Additionally, the contractor will gain first hand knowledge from you as well as familiarity with the site, thereby improving the accuracy of the bid.

Once you have had three or four contractors out to the site, you can prepare of summary of the scope, including types of materials to be used, quantities, time needed for construction and some idea of the cost. This information can now be passed on to the decision makers along with your own recommendations. Now also is the time to decide whether there was more to this project than previously thought. It may be necessary to have other professionals get involved.

HOW TO PROCEED—Determine if you can handle the preparation of the work documents or if it is necessary hire a professional. After discussing the infor-

mation gathered from these first two items, it is time to decide how to proceed.

Sometimes a seemingly simple project becomes more involved and it is necessary to seek help. As with contractors, if engineers and consultants are needed on a project, they must also be interviewed and provide you with information to help with the bidding process, as outlined above. Summarize their ideas and try to get some budgetary costs on their services and the project as well. It usually takes about 10 minutes to figure out who knows what they are talking about and who doesn't. It's important to work with decision makers who truly get a feel for the complexities of the project.

If on the other hand you are totally confident in handling this project without the professionals, great. This will speed things up and the fewer people involved the faster the project can move.

THIS STEP IS REALLY IMPORTANT SO LISTEN UP!—At least 30% of the work my company does each year is redoing, repairing, refinishing or replacing work previously done by others and left in a poor or incomplete state. The original bid documents, particularly the scope of work, was never properly outlined and/or understood. The contractor qualification section was not included or the follow up was never done. More often than not the contractor was not qualified for the specialty athletic field construction project.

Put together a scope of work for the bid package that is specific, simple, & covers all the bases. I like unit price bids with estimated quantities because we have everyone bidding the same thing. Some contractors are not good at plan take-offs or even measuring in the field. This is a shame. But to protect yourself, include a realistic, not optimistic, estimate of quantities. Of course, include a nice spread sheet style form with all the items to be bid shown in unit prices. Some items are better left lump sum if the quantities are difficult to quantify or prove. Always state however, that these are approximate quantities and estimates. It is the contractor's responsibility to bring to your attention any bid item or quantity he feels is incorrect. You will not get complete and accurate bids if you do not have everyone bidding the same scope. The dramatically lower priced contractor probably intends on doing a whole lot less than you expect. If your bids come in closely priced, the bid package was probably very concise.

CONTRACTOR QUALIFICATION—Include a form to be filled out, showing the contractor's experience, number of years in business, etc. Five years is a good minimum time in business.

CONTRACTOR REFERENCES—Most contractors should have these documents ready to include with the bid package. Include a form to be filled out anyway. Be sure to call all of those references. If you know that the contractor has worked on a job recently and it is not on his list, you want to be sure to call that one!

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SAMPLE BID EVALUATION FORM

Project Name: Sample Project

Project Budget: 10,900.00

Bidding Contractors:	Joe's Contracting	Deb's Grassing	Pete's Sod
Amount Bid by Each Contractor	\$10,000.00	\$8,500.00	\$11,500.00
Completeness of bid	5	2	4
Experience level	5	5	3
Good references	5	3	1
Site visit (0 points if not done and 5 if done)	5	5	5
Bid on time?	5	5	5
Is the business location local?	3	5	4
Past jobs w/this contractor: Quality of work?	0	2	5
Were past jobs w/this contr. in on time?	0	-4	4
Price: (lowest price is 3 point, highest is 1)	2	3	1
Points	30	26	32
Value Bidding (Price is worth 55% of bid points)	13.5	14.3	14.4
TOTAL POINTS	43.5	40.3	46.4

At first glance, the best value is probably Pete's sod with 32 points but wait, is it? Pete's Sod priced the job at 15% higher than Joe's Contracting. We haven't worked with Joe before, but his references and experience levels are outstanding. Price is worth 55% of the bid points, so let's add that in and see what happens when you consider value bidding. Take the lowest bid of 26 and multiply it by 55%. You get 14.3. The other bidders get the remaining 45% each. Pete's sod may still have the highest score, but his price is over our budget of \$10,900.00.

After reviewing references and past histories, the **BEST VALUE** for the project budget is Joe's Contracting with 43.5 points.

BID EVALUATION FORM—You may have to argue with the Purchasing and Legal Department on this one, but give it a go. The key elements for determining a good value are:

Split the bid up by percentage or give values on a scale of 1 to 5 or similar with 5 being the best. Here are some examples: Completeness of bid: 0-5, Experience: 0-5, Good references: 0-5, bid in on time: 0-1, Site visit: 0-1, etc. Then run a total for each contractor. This value may be worth 35% of the bid. Using the 0-5 scale, rate your prior experiences with the contractor: (i.e. unsatisfactory, unable to complete the project, poor, good, excellent).

Price is worth 55% of the bid, but only for contractors with complete bids. All incomplete bids need to be thrown out or re-bid. Be sure to research the financial stability of the contractor. Ask for credit reports and bank references.

PAYMENT AND PERFORMANCE BONDS—These are a safeguard and may be necessary. On smaller projects, using contractors with higher points, the bonds can be waived and this money can then be put to use on other projects.

Obviously this is an over simplification but for most projects, this system will work. It certainly beats the typical "go with the low bidder" system that has never worked well, and yet it is still widely used by many short thinking, hurried individuals who think only of price and not of value. ■

Dell Haverland is president of Sports Turf One, Inc., Boynton Beach, FL, www.sportsturfone.com



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