

CMAR Selection Process Guide

A step-by-step guide for public entities in Iowa hiring a construction manager-at-risk for a public improvement project.

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About this Guide

Construction manager-at-risk (CMAR) delivery was approved for public improvement projects in Iowa in 2022, establishing Chapter 26A of the Iowa Code and giving public entities a new mechanism for selecting a construction partner through value-based procurement.

This delivery method allows a public owner to move beyond the lowest-bid model and select the firm it believes will provide the best overall value on its project. Done well, the selection process complies with Chapter 26A of the Iowa Code and is a strategic opportunity to identify the right partner for a complex public investment. The structure and evaluation criteria an owner establishes at the outset will directly shape the quality of that decision.

This guide is designed to support public owners through that process, from understanding CMAR delivery and its statutory requirements under Chapter 26A, to organizing a selection approach that is both legally sound and oriented toward finding the best fit for your project.

STAGES OF THE PROCESS		
Stage	Goal	Timing
Prepare & Strategize	Inform a process and scoring approach that meets your goals as Owner.	Issue public notice of intent to enter into a guaranteed maximum price (GMP) contract at least 14 days prior to issue Request for Qualifications (RFQ).
Request for Qualifications (RFQ)	Receive qualifying information from firms that is relevant to you and your project.	Issue RFQ with responses due no less than 13 days and no more than 45 days after issuing the RFQ.
Request for Proposals (RFP)	Receive fee proposals from firms that are comparable to one another and provide a full picture of cost of services provided.	Issue Request for Proposals (RFP) to qualified firms, with proposal due no more than 45 days after issuing RFP.
Interview (optional)	Recommended step to meet qualified/shortlisted firms face-to-face.	Interview select number of firms in conjunction with or at the conclusion of the RFP phase.

This guide is intended for information purposes only and reflects the general industry practices related to construction manager-at-risk (CMAR) project delivery. Coordinate with your organization's own internal procurement practices to ensure overall compliance with applicable standards.

Prepare and strategize your process, and issue a Notice of Intent

Major components to prepare and strategize your process

- Set the timeline for the process from the Notice of Intent to final selection of CMAR. Note required durations in Chapter 26A of the Iowa Code.
- Identify the “selection committee” – individuals who can provide meaningful input
- Design the process to narrow the field of candidates with minimum scoring thresholds
- Prioritize the qualities you are seeking in your CMAR to inform your scoring approach
- Officially begin the process by issuing a Notice of Intent

Identify the selection committee

Consider these questions:

- Who can provide meaningful knowledge and context in scoring?/
- Who has the bandwidth to score and provide feedback?
- Should your design consultant participate in scoring? Just advise and provide context? Be totally hands off? Your design consultant is typically among the most qualified in the room to assess. We suggest they play a role in scoring.

Design the process for narrowing the field of candidate firms

This process allows you to eliminate unqualified firms from contention. Set your qualification threshold via a scoring “floor” (e.g., scoring below 70% in RFQ stage).

Though not required by Iowa Code, we advise incorporating interviews into the process. Interviews provide the best opportunity to get to know the team you may be hiring. We advise interviewing no more than four (4) firms to limit interview fatigue for the selection committee.

Prioritize the qualities you are seeking in your CMAR to inform scoring approach

Who are the kinds of firms you want to attract? As the Owner, force-rank the following criteria in order of importance/priority. Revisit this list when you are weighting the criteria in your RFQ.

Your Ranking	Example Ranking	Criteria
	1	Strength/experience of the proposed project team
	3	Firm’s experience with projects like mine
	4	Approach to leading construction projects
	5	Safety record and approach
	2	Overall firm characteristics (location, size, company structure, reputation)

Issue a Notice of Intent to enter a Guaranteed Maximum Price (GMP) contract

Under Iowa Code Chapter 26A (effective Jul. 1, 2022), public entities must publicly disclose a Notice of Intent to enter a Guaranteed Maximum Price (GMP) contract at least 14 days prior to posting a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for Construction Manager at-Risk (CMaR). See our attached Notice of Intent template. Once produced, we suggest publishing this to Master Builders of Iowa’s public plan room. Visit <https://www.mbi.build/our-services/project-information/notice-to-bidder/> for more information.

Preparing and strategizing your process for hiring a CMAR is about informing a selection process and scoring approach that meets your goals as the Owner. Avoid copying and pasting a process from some other project.

STAGE 2

Request for Qualifications

Major Components of the RFQ

- Overview of your project
- Requested content
- Scoring weight for your criteria
- Response limitations (e.g., page limit or formatting)
- Timeline for each step of CMAR selection
- Directions for submitting

Refer to our sample RFQ for an example of the major components.

Provide what details you can about your project in the RFQ

The narrative detailing your project should include the scope of the project and any preliminary plans, approximate project size, overall project and/or construction budget, design and construction timing, and the design professional. This will allow firms to draw direct parallels between their experience and your project.

Avoid excessive instruction/restrictions on content

Provide enough structure for responses for you to be able to compare “apples to apples” but avoid putting your selection committee in a position in which they’re tasked with grading them solely on adherence to format rather than ultimately judging firms on demonstrated qualifications and expertise. Your goal is to hire the firm most capable and qualified of meeting your goals for your project.

Score RFQ Responses

Prepare your selection committee to score RFQ responses effectively. Instruct them to use the range of points available to ensure qualification criteria matters in the selection of your CMAR.

Sample of weighted scoring rubric based on ranked example of criteria (out of 100):

Example Ranking	Example Weights	Criteria
1	25	Strength/experience of the proposed project team
3	20	Firm’s experience with projects like mine
4	15	Approach to leading construction projects
5	15	Safety record and approach
2	25	Overall firm characteristics (location, size, company structure, reputation)

The goal of your RFQ process is to receive qualifying information from firms that is relevant to you and your project. Your goal is to hire the firm most capable and qualified to meet your goals for the project.

STAGE 3

Request for Proposals

Ask firms to provide the following components of a fee proposal:

- Preconstruction lump sum and anticipated hours by position
- Construction fee as % of the cost of work
- Hourly rates for construction staff

Provide firms with a fee and cost matrix that delineates what items are to be included in the CMAR fee percentage, pre-construction phase lump sum, construction phase services, cost of work (included in the GMP), or to be provided by the owner or others. An example of this matrix is provided online at <https://storycon.com/cmar-resources/>.

In order for respondents to provide appropriately priced and comparable fee proposals, the Owner needs to provide baseline budget and schedule assumptions, and provide current status of design and the expected timeline, as well as expected preconstruction services.

If the project is developed in design to any extent, the Owner could also ask for project-specific approach in addition to the fee proposal – i.e. preliminary schedule, sequence of construction, phasing, VE ideas, budget considerations, etc.

Receiving proposals from firms that are comparable to one another and provide an idea of their cost of services provided allows you to complete the picture of those firms' overall value and make a value-based selection of your CMAR.

STAGE 4

Interviews (optional)

Interviewing finalist firms for your project is highly recommended, as it provides an opportunity to meet and converse face-to-face with the team you're likely to be working with on your project. Scoring can be mostly discretionary and circumstantial based on your project.

Invite finalist firms to interview – ideally no more than three or four over the course of a day or two. Firm interviews are typically 45 minutes to an hour in length, with a portion of the time dedicated to presentations and a portion dedicated to discussion/Q&A.

Provide firms with the time limit and your desired format (if any) ahead of interviews, and notify firms of anything you'd like them to come prepared to present or discuss.