

BCCA Development of Electronic Planroom & Regional Distribution of Project Tender Documents

Our construction associations have evolved from the early builder's exchanges that were developed to provide contractors with access to blueprints for bidding purposes. While the technology has changed, the core service of our present day construction associations continues to be providing members with access to tender documents and bidding information. In recent years, a number of threats to the Association's ability to continue to provide this service have surfaced. The leadership of construction associations across the country has become increasingly concerned that the loss of this core service may mean the end of our associations, as we know them.

These threats have been precipitated by several key developments. First, is the decision taken by the Federal government that they would no longer supply bidders with tendering documents for their projects. As a result they entered into an exclusive contract with a national firm to develop and maintain a system to advertise, produce and distribute project information. The resulting system, known as the Open Bidding System (now Cebra/Merx) required that bidders pay for the information service as well as pay a non-refundable charge for the drawings and specifications. It was only with heavy lobbying efforts by CCA that Plan Rooms were able to preserve the right to access the information and display the documents without having to pay for them.

The firm that now has the Federal contract for this service has been marketing itself to the cash strapped provincial and even municipal governments across the

country. It has met with varying degrees of success and to date has not been able to come to an agreement with the Province of BC.

The second key development has been the rapid evolution of technology that is changing the way documents are being distributed. The US Army Corp of Engineers for example, no longer distributes any paper for tendering purposes. Their advertising is done electronically and their documents are being distributed on-line and on CDs. It is growing every day, but no less than a dozen electronic Plan Rooms exist throughout the States. These operations charge their members up to \$5000.00 annually for access to their information. As the technology becomes more available and less expensive, the likelihood of our local associations being forced to compete with commercial operations increases. Several companies are currently marketing their product in Canada.

Given these factors, the Construction Associations of B.C. developed a plan of action to protect our position as the primary source of tendering document services for the industry. At the same time, we wanted to increase the value of membership by providing expanded and better services. These factors combined with the realities in the marketplace relating to the outright sale of tender documents to bidders caused the associations to review our long-standing policy supporting refundable plan deposits.

In the process of considering this issue the associations maintained the core objective of finding a solution that would keep the long term costs for the industry as low as possible. It was clearly recognized

that if bidders were to now pay for documents that those costs would become part of their bidding overhead that would, at least initially, be difficult to recover. This factor was most significant as it related to Public sector projects. Many members reported that the trend on private projects is increasingly to make the bidder responsible to pay for the documents.

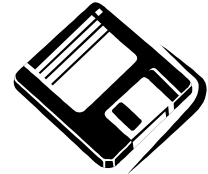
With this background in mind our association Boards proceeded to develop a strategy and policies that recognized the market conditions and that would, once implemented, maintain members' costs for documents at the lowest possible level. In order to do this several steps were necessary. We had to put in place the technology to deliver bidding information and documents at the least possible cost. We had to put in place policies and agreements with public owners that would enable us to retain "the business" rather than having it awarded to a commercial, for profit, enterprise. Finally we had to modify our own policies to accommodate these new realities.

To date we have achieved most of the steps in this transition to a new way of providing this core service. The Boards of Directors for the Regional Associations and BCCA approved a new policy on document access that acknowledged the necessary changes required to achieve the lowest cost to industry. The electronic technology is in place to provide members with instant on-line access to project documents. For a nominal administration fee, members can view documents on their computer screens. Processes are in place to be able to print sets or portions of sets for as low a cost to members as possible. Finally, we have proposed to the Provincial Government, a pilot program to test the viability of having our associations advertise, produce and distribute documents for public projects.

As we have managed our way through this change, it has always been top of mind that our objective is to minimize, or even reduce, the total cost to members for access to bidding information. While the transition to paying for documents takes place there will be those who will argue for the traditional model of refundable deposits. Over what will likely be a short period of time bidding practices will need to change to incorporate the cost of documents into administrative

overhead. In the mean time, the strategy offers those who wish it, an opportunity to reduce other costs of bidding that will hopefully offset the temporary increase in direct cost arising from these necessary changes.

BCCA Standard Documents Available On-Line



The BCCA "Documents-On-Disk" program is now available through the BCCA website www.bccasn.com (third item on our main page; click on Documents-On-Disk). The program, once downloaded, will enable users to print out the following BCCA Standard Documents:

- BCCA200 - Construction Contract Between Prime Contractor and Subcontractor
- BCCA203 - Construction Contract Between Subcontractor and Subsubcontractor
- APPENDIX-C (BCCA 202) - Official Bid Depository Bid Form
- APPENDIX-E - Bonding not Required Notice Form
- APPENDIX-F - Cash Allowance - Stipulated Sum Schedule

Users of the program must be aware that in order for the BCCA200 and BCCA203 contracts to be authorized by the BCCA, they must have the correct seal affixed where indicated. Seals are available for purchase from the BC Regional Construction Associations. APPENDIX-C, E, and F may be printed and used freely as needed.