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AUTHORITY: 7 U.S.C. 901-950b; Pub. L. 103-354, 108 Stat. 3178 (7 U.S.C. 6941 et seq.).

SOURCE: 61 FR 48606, Sept. 16, 1996, unless otherwise noted.

Subpart A—Policy and Procedures With Respect to Consultant Services Funded by Borrowers—General

§ 1789.150 Purpose.

This part sets forth policies and the procedures for implementing subsection (c) of section 18 of the Rural Electrification Act of 1936, as amended (7 U.S.C. 901 et seq.) (RE Act) which authorizes the Rural Utilities Service (RUS) to use the services of Consultants funded by the Borrowers to facilitate timely action on Applications by Borrowers for financial assistance and other approvals.

§ 1789.151 Definitions.

As used in this part:

Administrator means the Administrator of the Rural Utilities Service (RUS).

Application means a request for financial assistance under the RE Act or such other approvals as may be required of the RUS pursuant to the terms of outstanding loan or security instruments or otherwise.

Borrower means any organization which has an outstanding loan(s) made or guaranteed by RUS or its predecessor agency, the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) under the RE Act or any organization which has submitted or submits an Application before RUS.

Consultant means a person or firm which has been retained pursuant to this subpart under a contract to provide financial, legal, engineering, environmental, or other technical advice and services.

Consultant Contract means a contract for the performance of consulting services for RUS, to be paid using funds provided by a Borrower, which may be in the form of a Retainer Contract, purchase order, or other form as may be appropriate.

Escrow Account means an account established pursuant to § 1789.158.

Escrow Agreement means an agreement, between a Borrower, a Consultant and a Third-party Commercial Institution, meeting the requirements of § 1789.167.

Final Invoice means the closing Invoice prepared for a given Task Order.

Financial Consultant means a Consultant retained pursuant to this part to provide financial advisory services.

Funding Agreement means an agreement, between a Borrower and a Consultant, providing for the Borrower to fund the costs of a Task Order and otherwise meeting the requirements of § 1789.166.

Indemnification Agreement means an agreement by a Borrower meeting the requirements of § 1789.162.

Invoice means an invoice prepared by a Consultant pursuant to the terms of a Consultant Contract.

Legal Consultant means any Consultant retained pursuant to this part to provide legal services to RUS.

Notice of Proposal to Fund means a notice meeting the requirements of § 1789.156 provided to RUS by the Borrower.

Organizational conflict of interest means that because of other activities or relationships with other persons, a person is unable or potentially unable to render impartial assistance or advice to the Government, or the person's objectivity in performing the contract work is or might be otherwise impaired, or a person has an unfair competitive advantage.

Retainer Contract means a Consultant Contract providing for a minimum required payment to a Consultant irrespective of whether services are utilized by RUS thereunder.

Task Order means a written request for consultant services pursuant to the terms of a Consultant Contract.

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Third-party Commercial Institution means a commercial financial institution mutually acceptable to the Borrower and the Consultant.

§ 1789.152 Policy.

(a) As provided in this subpart, RUS may, at its discretion, use the services of Consultants funded by a Borrower where such services will facilitate timely action on an Application by such Borrower for financial assistance or other approvals. Such Consultants may provide financial, legal, engineering, environmental or other technical advice and services in connection with the review of an Application.

(b) With the approval of RUS, a Borrower may fund the cost of consulting services in connection with the review by RUS of an Application by such Borrower. Such funding shall be provided pursuant to the terms of a Funding Agreement between the Borrower and the Consultant designated by RUS.

(c) RUS may not, without the consent of the Borrower, require, as a condition of processing any Application for approval, that the Borrower agree to pay the costs of a Consultant hired to provide services to RUS.

(d) The government shall retain sole discretion in the selection of Consultants to provide services to RUS and the form of contract utilized. RUS may either use the services of one or more Consultants retained under Retainer Contracts or the government may elect to retain a Consultant not otherwise on retainer. The government shall have sole discretion to prescribe terms and conditions of Consultant Contracts. The Borrower may bring considerations to the attention of the government which the Borrower deems pertinent to the selection process.

(e) RUS shall retain sole discretion as to whether to further pursue use of an outside consultant for the relevant application in the event the Borrower does not enter into the agreements referenced in §1789.158(c)(3)(iii) within 60 days of the government providing to the Borrower the information set forth in §1789.158(c)(3).

§ 1789.153 Borrower funding.

Borrowers shall use their general funds for the purposes of funding con-

sultant services hereunder. Borrowers may not use the proceeds of loans made or guaranteed under the RE Act for costs incurred by Borrowers pursuant to the funding of consultant services for RUS.

§ 1789.154 Eligible borrowers.

All Borrowers are eligible to fund consultant services under this part.

§ 1789.155 Approval criteria.

RUS will consider approving the use of consultant services funded by a Borrower on a case by case basis taking into account, among other matters, the following:

(a) Whether such services are required to facilitate timely action on a Borrower's Application. RUS shall determine what represents timely action with respect to each Application considering, among other matters, the review period normally required for such projects by RUS and other lenders and the consequences to the Borrower of adjusting the review period.

(b) The availability of staff resources, the priorities of other projects then before RUS, and the efficiencies to be realized from the use of consultant services.

(c) Whether it is in the best interest of RUS to use Borrower-funded Consultants. Certain types of projects, such as those involving issues of program-wide significance, may not be well suited for the use of Borrower funded Consultants.

§ 1789.156 Proposal procedure.

(a) In the event RUS determines that consideration should be given to the use of a Borrower-funded consultant in connection with the review of an Application, the RUS Regional Director or the Director of the Power Supply Division, as appropriate, will discuss with the Borrower the nature of the Application and the projected review period required of RUS. If RUS concludes that the projected review period will not result in timely action on the Application, and after being so notified in writing by RUS the Borrower wishes to fund consultant services to facilitate RUS review, the Borrower shall submit

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to the same Director a funding proposal. The proposal shall set forth the following:

(1) Identification in the heading or caption as a Notice of Proposal to Fund Consulting Services;

(2) Borrower's REA/RUS designation;

(3) Borrower's legal name and address;

(4) A description of the Application, critical issues and concerns relating to the Application, time deadlines, and the consequences of any delays in RUS review;

(5) A description of the consulting service(s) that would facilitate timely RUS review of the Application; and

(6) Such additional documents and information as RUS may request.

(b) RUS will review the Notice of Proposal to Fund and any additional information RUS deems relevant in determining whether to proceed with procuring Borrower funded Consultants. If RUS proposes to utilize Legal Consultants, RUS must obtain the concurrence of the Office of General Counsel (OGC) of the Department of Agriculture. RUS will notify the Borrower in writing of its determination.

§ 1789.157 Consultant contract.

(a) The Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR), 48 CFR Ch. 1, and the Agriculture Acquisition Regulation (AGAR), 48 CFR Ch. 4, shall apply to all Consultant Contracts entered into pursuant to this part except as provided in this section.

(1) Contracts for Legal Consultants shall provide for a technical representative from OGC.

(2) All Consultant Contracts shall provide for an escrow account funding mechanism pursuant to this part and for the government's sole discretion in determining whether payments are to be made from the Escrow Account to the Consultant.

(3) All Consultant Contracts shall provide that payment of all obligations for work performed thereunder must be satisfied by amounts available in the Escrow Account; with the exception of the annual retainer fee, if any, Consultants shall not be entitled to any payments from the government.

(b) The provisions of paragraph (a) of this section shall be given prominent

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emphasis in requests for proposals issued under this part.

§ 1789.158 Implementation.

(a) Upon making a determination to go forward with Borrower funding for consulting services, RUS shall initiate a procurement request for a Consultant to provide the services. The government may either contract with a Consultant on a case by case basis or elect to use a Consultant pursuant to an outstanding Retainer Contract. The Borrower will not be informed of the Consultant selected until such time as the government provides the information set forth in paragraph (c)(3) of this section.

(b) If the government determines to contract with a Consultant on a case by case basis, the government shall notify the Borrower of the applicable procedures.

(c) If the government determines to contract with a Consultant under an outstanding Retainer Contract, the following procedures will normally apply:

(1) Pursuant to the terms of the contract, the government will prepare a draft Task Order requesting consultant services in connection with the review of the Borrower's Application. The draft Task Order shall set forth for the Consultant's review and acceptance, a description of the services to be provided and applicable time frames for the provision of such services.

(2) The government will request that the Consultant:

(i) Notify the government as to the acceptability of the form and substance of the draft Task Order;

(ii) Notify the government as to its ability to provide a satisfactory conflict of interest certification consistent with the requirements of the FAR (48 CFR ch. 1); and

(iii) Provide a cost estimate for the draft Task Order.

(3) When the government is satisfied with the response(s) received pursuant to paragraph (c)(2) of this section, the government shall promptly provide to the Borrower:

(i) A copy of the draft Task Order identifying the Consultant;

(ii) The Consultant's cost estimate for the draft Task Order; and

(iii) Contract information required to enable the Borrower to develop a Funding Agreement, an Escrow Agreement and an Indemnification Agreement (the “agreements”).

(4) The Borrower shall develop and submit to the government for approval executed originals of:

(i) The agreements; and

(ii) A certified copy of a resolution of the board of directors authorizing the Borrower to enter into the agreements and to take such other action as is necessary to effect the purposes of the agreements.

(5) Upon receiving written RUS approval of the agreements and the form and substance of the board resolution, the Borrower shall:

(i) Establish and fund the Escrow Account; and

(ii) Provide written notice to the government of the Escrow Account number, the funding thereof, and such other information as required pursuant to the agreements.

(6) After the Borrower has funded the Escrow Account, the government shall issue Task Order(s) for consultant services in accordance with the terms and conditions of the applicable Retainer Contract.

§ 1789.159 Contract administration.

The government shall be solely responsible for the administration of a Consulting Contract and shall have complete control over the scope of the Consultant’s work, the timetable for performance, the standards to be applied in determining the acceptability of deliverables and the approval of payment of Invoices.

§ 1789.160 Access to information.

The Borrower shall not have rights in nor right of access to the work product of the Consultant. All analyses, studies, opinions, memoranda, and other documents and information provided by the Consultant pursuant to a Consulting Contract may be released and made available to the Borrower only with the approval of RUS. This section does not restrict release of information by RUS pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act (5 U.S.C. 552(a)(2)) or other legal process.

§ 1789.161 Conflicts of interest.

The standard for determining organizational conflicts of interest shall be as set forth in the FAR subpart 9.5 (48 CFR part 9, subpart 9.5); however, the identification of the existence of an organizational conflict of interest may be made by either the Administrator or the cognizant Contracting Officer. In the event an organizational conflict of interest is determined to exist, the cognizant Contracting Officer shall take the actions prescribed at FAR 9.504 (48 CFR 9.504) to attempt to avoid, neutralize or mitigate the conflict. Should these actions be deemed by the Administrator and the Contracting Officer to adequately resolve the conflict, the contracting action with the offeror/contractor may proceed. Should the Administrator or the Contracting Officer determine that an organizational conflict of interest still exists such that contract award or other contracting action cannot be taken (award of task/delivery order, etc.) the offeror/contractor shall be so informed by the Contracting Officer and be provided a reasonable opportunity to respond in accordance with FAR 9.504(e) (48 CFR 9.504(e)). After considering the contractor’s response, if it is found by both the Administrator and Contracting Officer to remedy the conflict of interest, the contracting action may proceed. If the Administrator and Contracting Officer determine that the contractor’s response does not resolve the conflict of interest, yet continuing with the contracting action with the offeror/contractor in question is considered in the best interest of the United States, a waiver in accordance with FAR 9.503 (48 CFR 9.503) may be executed. This waiver shall be submitted under the Contracting Officer’s signature and approved by the Administrator. The Administrator has been delegated Head of Contracting Activity authority by the USDA Senior Procurement Executive solely for the purpose of waiver approval.

§ 1789.162 Indemnification agreement.

As a condition of approving Borrower funding, the government will require the Borrower to enter into an Indemnification Agreement, in form and substance satisfactory to RUS, providing

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that the Borrower will indemnify and hold harmless the government and any officers, agents or employees of the government from any and all liability, including costs, fees, and settlements arising out of, or in any way connected with the payment of the Consultant's fee pursuant to the Consultant Contract. The Indemnification Agreement may recognize, as a condition of liability thereunder, the rights of the borrower to prompt notice, to use of counsel of its own choosing, and to participation in any settlement of a claim against which indemnification is sought.

§ 1789.163 Waiver.

RUS may waive any requirement or procedure of this subpart by determining that its application in a particular situation would not be in the government's interest, except that certain provision that the subject contracts are subject to the provisions of the FAR (48 CFR ch. 1) and AGAR (48 CFR ch. 4).

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Subpart B—Escrow Account Funding and Payments

§ 1789.166 Terms and conditions of funding agreement.

Funding Agreements between the Borrower and a Consultant shall be in form and substance satisfactory to RUS and provide for, among other matters, the following:

- (a) Specific reference by number to the applicable Consulting Contract entered into between the government and the Consultant;
- (b) Specific reference by number to the applicable Task Order (where applicable);
- (c) A brief description of the Application;
- (d) A requirement that Invoices make specific reference to:
 - (1) The applicable contract and Task Order(s); and
 - (2) The Escrow Account from which payment is to be made;
- (e) A requirement that the Final Invoice for a Task Order be clearly identified as such;

(f) A description of the services to be provided by the Consultant to RUS and the applicable time frames for the provision of such services;

(g) Agreement that the Borrower shall pay for the Consultant services provided to RUS under the applicable contract through an Escrow Account established pursuant to an Escrow Agreement, the Consultant shall not provide services to RUS under the applicable contract unless there are sufficient funds in the Escrow Account to pay for such services, the Consultant shall seek compensation for services provided under the applicable contract from, and only from, funds made available through the Escrow Account, and the Consultant must submit all Invoices to the government for approval.

(h) A form of Escrow Agreement satisfactory to the Borrower, Consultant and the designated Third-party Commercial Institution;

(i) A schedule setting forth when and in what amounts the Borrower shall fund the Escrow Account;

(j) Acknowledgment by the Consultant of the Indemnification Agreement provided by the Borrower to the government; and

(k) The Funding Agreement shall not be effective unless and until approved in writing by RUS.

§ 1789.167 Terms and conditions of escrow agreement.

Escrow Agreements between and among the Borrower, Consultant and Third-party Commercial Institution shall be in form and substance satisfactory to RUS and provide for, among other matters, the following:

- (a) Specific reference by number to the applicable contract for services;
- (b) Specific reference by number to the applicable Task Order;
- (c) Specific reference by number to the Escrow Account into which funds are to be deposited;
- (d) Invoices to specifically identify the applicable contract and Task Order(s);
- (e) Funds to be held in the Escrow Account by the escrow agent until paid to the Consultant pursuant to the government's authorization;
- (f) The Escrow Account to be closed and all remaining funds remitted to