

Local Project Administration Manual & Resource Guide

Advertise & Award



MaineDOT

Integrity - Competence - Service

2020 Update

Advertise & Award

Construction work on projects with federal and state money must be awarded to contractors hired through competitive bidding. A low-bid process must be used by law; contractors based in a specific area cannot be favored. (The exception to the competitive solicitation requirement is Force Account work, covered in Chapter 9, “Force Account Work.”)

When design, permitting and right-of-way are completed, the local agency administering a project may advertise for construction bids after MaineDOT has signed off on the final plans, specifications and estimate package (PS&E) and given construction authorization.

Chapter 8 provides guidance on the requirements for advertising for competitive bids, opening and reviewing the bids received, and awarding a construction contract. It contains the following:

- A summary of the bid process (pages 8-1 to 8-5);
- A checklist (page 8-6);
- Bid award flowchart (page 8-7);
- Sample award request (page 8-8); and
- Sample Notice of Intent to Award (page 8-9).



Caution: If you advertise a federally funded project without MaineDOT’s written authorization, you will forfeit **ALL** of the federal money for the project.

8.1 Bidding Guidance

Except for work performed by Force Account, MaineDOT-funded projects require competitive solicitation. Sections 102 and 103 of MaineDOT’s Standard Specifications govern the process: www.maine.gov/mdot/contractors/publications/standardspec/docs/2014/div100.pdf

General procedures include the following:

- Local agencies must issue a Notice to Contractors with a project description, deadline for sealed bids, time and location of bid opening, bidding requirements, and basis of award.
- Projects may be advertised on municipal websites, and MaineDOT will post advertised locally administered projects on its website: www.maine.gov/mdot/contractors/
- Local agencies may use newspaper advertisements, but this method is not mandatory.
- The bidding period must be at least **3 weeks**, but it can be longer if an agency so chooses.
- The local agency administering a project may hold a **pre-bid meeting** enabling contractors to view the project and submit questions, but this is not mandatory.

- Questions** must be submitted in writing to the contact listed in the Notice to Contractors, at least 48 hours before bid opening.
 - The person answering should repeat the question and provide the same answer to all bidders in writing through amendments or at the pre-bid conference.
 - Amendments should be posted online, if that is how a project is advertised.
- During the bidding period, the MaineDOT project manager must sign off on any bid amendments that change the approved plans or specifications.
- The Notice to Contractors must specify the **date and time** at which sealed bids will be opened. If that date changes, bidders must be notified of such through addenda and an announcement made before the originally scheduled date and time.

8.2 Bidder Pre-qualification

Bidders must demonstrate the ability to complete certain types of projects successfully, a requirement that must be included in the Notice to Contractors for a project, as follows:

- If the estimated construction cost is **greater than \$300,000**, a bidder must have completed a highway, bridge or project-specific pre-qualification through MaineDOT to be awarded the contract: www.maine.gov/mdot/contractors/prequal/
- If the estimated construction cost is **less than \$300,000**, a bidder must demonstrate successful completion of projects of similar size and scope to be awarded the contract.

Note: Contractors that are debarred cannot be awarded government contracts or subcontracts. Check with MaineDOT to find out if any bidder on your project is debarred.

8.3 Bid Guaranty (new)

The agency advertising a project generally must require each bidder to provide a bond or other acceptable surety, as set out below, as a bid guaranty. The amount must be specified in the Notice to Contractors; it is commonly set at 5 percent of the bid amount. Failure to submit a bid guaranty generally causes the rejection of a bid.

A bid guaranty, payable to the agency managing a project, must be one of the following:

- A bid bond issued by an insurer licensed by the State to do business in Maine;
- A cashier's check;
- A certified check;
- U.S. Postal Service money order.

A bid guaranty serves to ensure that the low bidder will honor its bid and enter into a contract. The amount posted as a guaranty is forfeited if a bidder refuses to enter into a contract.

8.4 Bid Opening

Sealed bids received in accordance with the terms of the advertised Notice to Contractors are opened and read publicly at the time and place specified in the advertisement or in an applicable bid amendment. Usually, only the total price of each bid is read.

Unless a local agency intends to reject all bids, the agency must award a contract to the lowest responsive and responsible bidder for the bid amount, as set out below:

- A bid is responsive if it meets the requirements of the advertised Notice to Contractors and project specifications.
- A bidder is responsible if the company has the financial and technical capacity to carry out the work and fulfill the terms of the contract satisfactorily.

Negotiating the price before awarding a contract is **prohibited**. Doing so will cause a local agency to forfeit the federal and state money for a project. An agency may only negotiate with the successful bidder, if necessary, after a contract is signed.



If the local agency overseeing a project deems the lowest responsive bid to be unacceptably high, the agency must reject **ALL** bids. In such a case, the local project administrator must notify the MaineDOT project manager. The work may be re-advertised after the scope of work is adjusted, in consultation with MaineDOT.

8.5 Bid Analysis

After the bid opening, either the local administrator or a qualified designee, such as a consultant, must review the bids for errors and discrepancies. This analysis should cover the following:

- Checking for: 1.) correct multiplication of unit price and quantity; and 2.) correct summing of items for the total bid. In case of discrepancies, unit prices govern.
 - Reviewing unit prices for mathematical or material unbalancing that casts reasonable doubt on a bidder's ability to perform the work for the bid price.
- ➡ See Section 103.1.2 of MaineDOT's *Standard Specifications*, "Unbalanced Bids."
- Checking numerical and written unit prices. (If they differ, go by the *written* unit price.)
 - Reviewing the base bid and bid alternates to ensure that the apparent low bidder meets the requirements of the bid documents.



If the bid analysis finds defects in a bid proposal, the reviewing agency may deem them either **curable** or **non-curable**, as set out in sections 8.6 and 8.7 on the next page

➡ See Section 102.11 of MaineDOT's *Standard Specifications*, "Bid Responsiveness."

8.6 Non-curable Bid Defects

Bid defects are “non-curable” – meaning that a contractor won’t have a chance to correct them – if they cast doubt on the total bid amount or on a bidder’s ability to complete the contract work satisfactorily.

A local agency must **reject** a bid containing any of the following **non-curable** defects:

- The bid and bid guaranty are not delivered to the precise location and by the precise time specified in the Notice to Contractors or an applicable bid amendment;
- The bid is not signed by a duly authorized representative of the bidder;
- The unit price and bid amount for any item are missing;
- A lump sum price (if applicable) either is missing or illegible;
- A bid guaranty specified in the bid documents is not submitted with the bid;
- A bid contains conditional or alternate bidding language, such as the right to accept or reject an award of the contract;
- A bidder submits more than one bid for the same contract;
- A bidder and a related entity each submit a bid for the same contract;
- A bidder is debarred or otherwise disqualified from bidding on government contracts;
- The agency advertising a project finds substantial evidence of collusion by a bidder;
- A bidder fails to comply with any provision stating that non-compliance will result in rejection of a bid.

8.7 Curable Bid Defects

Not all discrepancies will disqualify a bid proposal. A local agency may give a bidder the opportunity to correct **curable** defects within a certain amount of time, when:

- The total sum of the items is missing from the Schedule of Items, but each item has a unit price and bid amount;
- Prices or signatures on the bid or bid guaranty are not in ink;
- A bidder signs only one of the two Contract Agreement, Offer & Award forms;
- The bid is not submitted on forms provided by the local agency in charge of the project or on identical copies thereof;
- A bidder fails to acknowledge receipt and consideration of bid amendments;
- A defect doesn’t raise a significant question about the total bid amount or the bidder’s ability to complete the work.

8.8 Contract Award

Unless the bid documents specify otherwise, the local agency administering a project must deliver a Notice of Intent to Award to the apparent low bidder within **30 days** of bid opening.

Before awarding a contract, a local agency must ensure that the apparent low bidder meets all conditions in the bid documents and MaineDOT's Standard Specifications. Examples of such conditions include, but are not limited to, delivering bonds, providing insurance certificates, fulfilling pre-qualification requirements, and documenting that the prime contractor will perform at least **30 percent** of the value of the contract with its own forces.

➔ See Section 103.3 of MaineDOT's *Standard Specifications*, "Post-Bid Qualification."

The local administrator must send the MaineDOT project manager a letter or email with the recommended bid award. The document should contain a bid tabulation with the engineer's estimate and all bids with unit prices. MaineDOT's approval is required before the contract may be awarded. (See sample Letter 16, on page 8-8.)

A contract generally must be executed within **14 days** after the low bidder has met the conditions of award. MaineDOT's project manager must receive copies of the award notice and contract.

8.9 Insurance Requirements (new)

The successful bidder on a locally administered project must provide signed, valid and enforceable certificates of insurance as a condition of award. The contractor must procure all insurance from a company licensed or approved by the State of Maine to do business in Maine.

Unless the MaineDOT project manager specifies otherwise, the minimum requirements set out below apply to the prime contractor and all subcontractors on projects funded by MaineDOT:

- Workers' Compensation;
- Commercial General Liability of \$1 million per occurrence and \$2 million in aggregate;
- Automobile Liability of \$1 million per occurrence.

➔ See Section 110.3 of MaineDOT's *Standard Specifications*, "Insurance."

8.10 Rejection of Lowest Successful Bid

If the apparent low bidder fails to fulfill the award conditions within the timeframe in the bid documents, the bidder forfeits the award. If this happens, the local agency managing a project has two options, which should be considered in consultation with MaineDOT's project manager:

- Award the contract to the responsible bidder with the next lowest responsive bid; or
- Reject all bids and re-advertise the project.

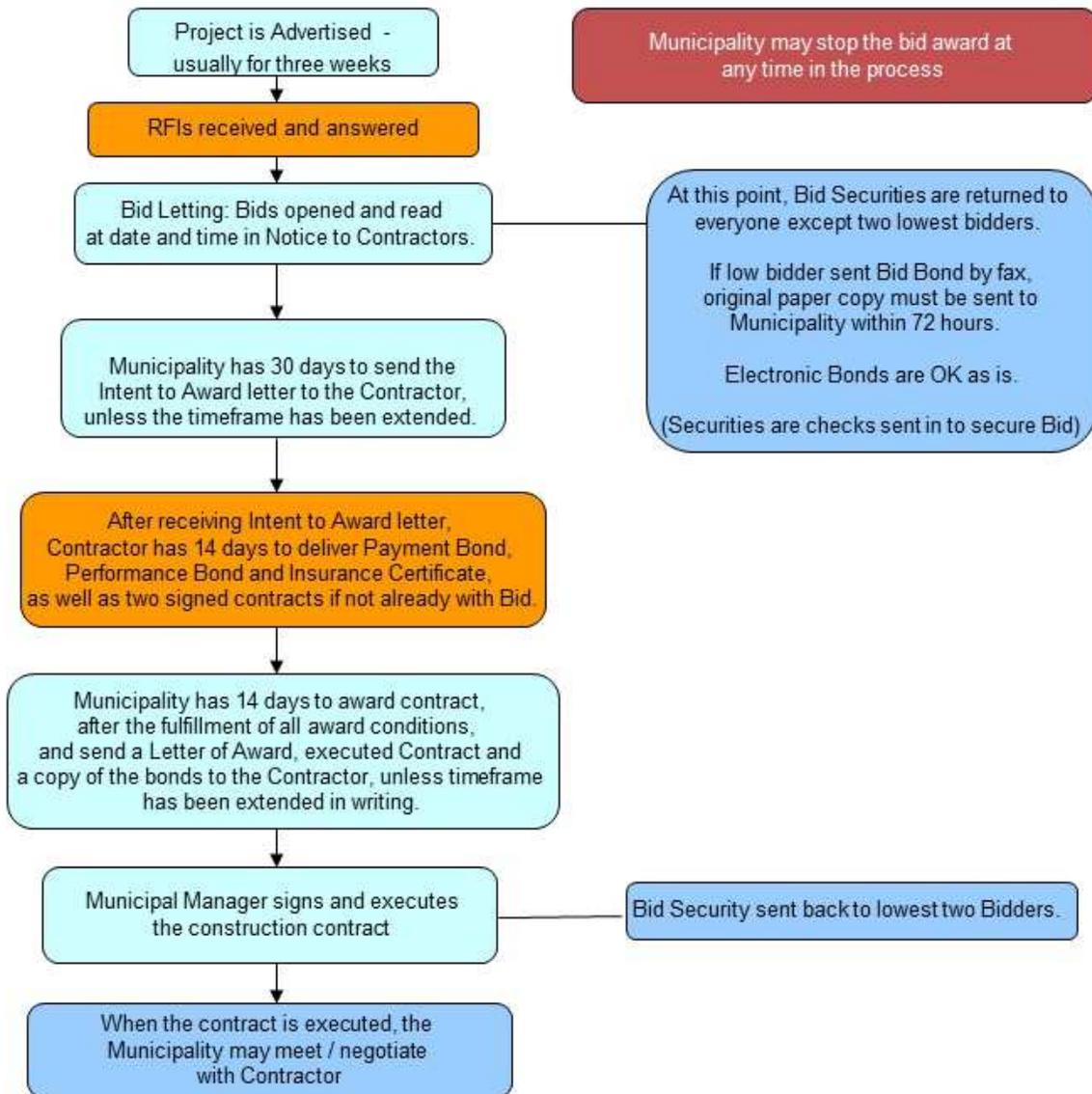
➔ See Section 103.6 of MaineDOT's *Standard Specifications*, "Failure to Fulfill Award Conditions."

8.11 Checklist: Advertise & Award

- Receive authorization to advertise from MaineDOT project manager.**
- Advertise the Notice to Contractors** (3-week minimum period).
 - Notice should be posted to municipal website and MaineDOT website.
 - A newspaper advertisement may be used, but this is not mandatory.
 - Date and location of the bid opening must be in the notice.
 - Basis of award must be clearly defined, so low bidder is apparent after bids are opened.
- Determine contractor qualifications:**
 - For contracts of \$300,000 or more, low bidder must be pre-qualified by MaineDOT.
 - For contracts of less than \$300,000, low bidder must demonstrate successful completion of projects with a comparable size and scope.
- Bidders must submit written questions using the Request for Information (RFI) form.**
 - The same answer must be distributed to all bidders in writing, with the question repeated.
- Issue addendum, if documents are modified or if answering a Request for Information.**
 - If there is not enough time for bidders to make changes, then delay the opening.
- Open and publicly read aloud all bids at the designated time.**
 - Prepare bid tabulation sheet.
 - Check submitted bids for tabulation errors.
 - Determine the lowest responsive bid.
- Review all bids for bid defects**
 - Go by the curable/non-curable language in MaineDOT Standard Specification 102.11.
 - Verify that contractors are licensed as legally required by the State of Maine.
- Determine the apparent successful bidder.**
 - Return bid securities to everyone except the two lowest bidders.
 - Notify the second bidder that securities will be held until contract execution.
- Send award recommendation to MaineDOT project manager (Letter 16).**
 - Tabulation of bids;
 - Engineer's estimate; and
 - Completed Contractor DBE Utilization Form (federally funded projects).
- Receive MaineDOT approval in writing of recommended award.**
- Award contract**, in accordance with Section 103 of MaineDOT's Standard Specifications:
 - Send Notice of Intent to Award to apparent successful bidder.
 - If contract is greater than or equal to \$125,000, the bidder has 14 days to deliver performance and payment bonds.
 - Bidder must provide certificates of insurance, which applies to all projects.
 - Sign contract.
 - Notify all unsuccessful bidders of such.
- Send copy of signed contract to MaineDOT project manager.**
 - Return bid securities to first and second bidders.

Bid Award Process

Section 103, MaineDOT Standard Specifications



Note:

An electronic version of this letter is found under the category “Construction” on the MaineDOT Local Project Administration website: <https://www.maine.gov/mdot/lpa/lpadocuments/>

[DATE]

[NAME], Project Manager
Maine Department of Transportation
Bureau of Project Development, Multimodal Program
16 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0016

Subject: Request to Award Construction Contract, Federal Project
MaineDOT WIN:

Dear [NAME]:

Attached for your review are the bid tabulations, engineer’s estimate and completed Contractor DBE Utilization Form for [SCOPE, LOCATION] in the Municipality of [NAME]. [CONTRACTOR NAME] is the apparent successful bidder. We request authorization to award the project to that contractor.

In making this request, we acknowledge that we cannot send out the Notice of Intent to Award without written authorization from MaineDOT.

If you need additional information, please let me know.

Sincerely,

[NAME], Municipal Project Administrator

Enclosures:

1. Bid tabulations
2. Cost estimate

Note:

An electronic version is found of this letter under the category “Construction” on the MaineDOT Local Project Administration website: <https://www.maine.gov/mdot/lpa/lpadocuments/>

[DATE]

[Firm name]

[Firm address]

Subject: NOTICE OF INTENT TO AWARD

Project: [Insert project location]

WIN: [Insert WIN]

Description: [Insert description]

Your company is the apparent successful bidder for the subject project. Upon receipt of your properly executed certificate of insurance, payment bond [use if contract >\$125,000], performance bond [use if contract >\$125,000], two signed Contract, Agreement, Offer, & Award Forms, a copy of this letter and projected payment schedule, we will sign the agreement, and you will have a written contract.

We will sign both originals provided with your submission and send one original agreement to you via certified mail. We will be in contact with you concerning a notice to proceed with the work.

Contract Amount: _____

If you have any questions on contract procedures, please feel free to contact me at [phone].

If federal money, include this statement:

Note that the prime contractor and subcontractors on Federal contracts must have accounts set up with Elation Systems for payroll processing. If you do not have an account, please register for one, at your earliest convenience, using the information in Special Provision, Section 104.

Sincerely,

MUNICIPALITY OF [INSERT NAME]

By _____
[Name, Title]
Municipal Project Administrator

END OF CHAPTER 8