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CSI: It's OK to destroy records

Practice is unusual in Idaho education, other state agencies

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The College of Southern Idaho says it's common to destroy records that show how it evaluates firms vying for construction projects.

But that differs from the way the Idaho Division of Public Works and other public institutions handle documents used in selecting contractors.

The Times-News recently asked CSI for public records regarding its selection of the Starr Corp. and CTA engineers and architects to design and build a \$6.5 million energy education building.

In June, CSI released evaluation forms with signatures of the four evaluators blanked out. When asked about the redaction, which is not allowed under state public records law, the college responded:

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"The evaluation forms ... were signed by each evaluator. The names were whited out on copies provided to the Times-News so that evaluators would not be cross examined concerning their evaluations. It is a common practice to destroy evaluation forms after the selection process is complete for this exact reason."

The forms are used to evaluate proposals from design-build teams. State law allows CSI to select contractors based on qualifications, rather than submission of low bids.

The University of Idaho has used the same design-build system, though the traditional bid approach is more commonplace, U of I officials said. When a design-build proposal is sought, "... There is a team and there are evaluation sheets and evaluation summary sheets," said U of I spokeswoman Tania Thompson. "Like the bid-tabulation sheets, these are a part of the project record and are kept in the project file. ... The evaluation summary sheets show how team members assigned points."

Those records are part of the project file, which is essentially a permanent record, Thompson said. The university's project files go back more than 20 years, she said.

At Lewis-Clark State College in Lewiston, bid evaluations are kept for three fiscal years beyond the end of the year they are submitted, said Bert Sahlberg, spokesman for the college.

Lewis-Clark used the design-build method once for a new nursing building. In that case, the names of the evaluation team and point totals were disclosed, but "people were not privy to how each evaluator rated each bidder," Sahlberg said.

"We believe that is intentional so that each evaluator can give an honest rating without worrying about undue pressure or future reprisal from a bidder," Sahlberg said.

Frank Zang, spokesman for Boise State University, said the Idaho Division of Public Works oversees most BSU construction.

The Division of Public Works also oversees state-financed construction at CSI and other on other campuses. It uses an evaluation form similar to CSI's in-house document, but never destroys them, said Tim Mason, the agency's administrator.

"We keep them all and the evaluation sheets become part of the project file," Mason said.

While CSI did not destroy its evaluation forms, state law requires agencies that reject records requests or that remove information from a record before its release to say in writing their legal authority in doing so.

All Idaho colleges and universities, including CSI, are subject to the state public records law.

CSI didn't provide a legal reason for redacting evaluator signatures, nor has it responded to a Times-News written request for the required explanation.

In response to a second formal record request the college released another set of copies of the evaluation forms.

About a fourth of those copies show blank signature lines, however. The college did not say whether those copies had been redacted, or why the signature lines were blank.

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