

Selecting an Architect

This worksheet is designed to help organizations select the right architect for their real estate project.

In selecting an architect or architectural firm to design your project, it is important that you consider the overall size, experience, design skills and business approach of each candidate. Your organization should choose the individual architect or firm that best understands your community mission, and brings to the project the optimum balance of experience, positive references and working chemistry. It is worthwhile to begin working with an architect early in the needs assessment process to get a visual representation of how your organization's space plans lay out. The firm hired for the predevelopment drawings does not necessarily have to be selected for the final project. Typically, the architect is responsible for designing a "buildable" building; developing plans, specifications and bidding documents; attending construction meetings; visiting the site; and signing off on work completed and payments to the general contractor.

Designate a Selection Committee

This group should decide how the architect will be chosen (e.g. consensus, majority or executive decision), and should include Board and/or staff and the project's designated project manager. *(This may be a designated staff person or an outside project manager.)*

Outline the Project

The committee should discuss the number and type of rooms needed, as well as project goals, schedule, budget, location and outline. This is called a "program".

The outline should address priorities such as timeframe, cost and design.

Establish the evaluation criteria for judging each applicant equally, based on the priorities of your project.

Decide on a Selection Process

Determine the process, timeline and criteria for selection. See below for suggested selection criteria.

Issue a Request for Proposals or a Request for Qualifications to your list of candidates.

The RFP and/or RFQ is typically followed up with interviews.

Collect a List of Candidates

Ask other organizations for recommendations or contact groups that have recently completed projects that involved architects.

Search the web for architects with experience in your type of real estate project. Pre-qualify architects according to your criteria, such as:

- The reputation and relevant experience of the firm.
- The track record of the candidate as confirmed by referrals.
- Evidence of repeat clients and the candidate's recent project history.
- The design quality and style of the architectural firm's work.

Solicit and Review the Proposals

When reviewing RFP responses, it is important that the committee considers:

- The proposed project team, including the qualifications of specific individuals assigned to the project within the firm.

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- The reputation and relevant experience of the architect and team members.
 - The budget-and-schedule track record of the candidate.
 - The size, area of specialization and length of practice as it corresponds to the size and type of project proposed.
 - The individual or firm's familiarity with local building conditions, codes and approval processes.
 - The proposed construction monitoring process.
 - The fee proposal.
 - What, if any, set procedures the candidate has for solving design problems.
 - The firm's approach to the design of the building.
 - The firm's experience working with nonprofit agencies or relevant projects.
 - Relationships with special technical consultants the project will require.

Interview the Candidates

When interviewing candidate firms, be sure to ask about:

- The level and type of involvement one can expect from the project's principal architect and key personnel.
- The architect or architectural firm's approach to cost estimating and cost control. Secure evidence that the firm has designed projects that have been on budget; ask about the average number of change orders on projects.
- The firm's experience in getting local approvals. Navigating the building department can be a complicated and challenging process. Individual inspectors interpret the code in a number of different ways. Look for an architect that has experience with similar projects, understands the code, and has a track record of successfully completed projects within your municipality.

Check References

This final step is critical. Your principal question should be aimed at discerning whether the previous client would use the same architect again, and why or why not. Other questions to ask references include those listed above under the interview questions.

Feel free to request a tour of facilities designed by the architect.

Negotiate a Contract

Select a firm, then enter into a contract to outline the firm's services.

AIA (American Institute of Architects) contracts are the industry standard, but can be viewed as a starting point.

Review the contract carefully with an attorney familiar with the standard practice of construction.

The contract with the architect governs the relationship and lays out the responsibilities of both parties, cost of the work, instruments of service, change in services, mediation, arbitration, claims for consequential damages, miscellaneous provisions, termination or suspension, payments to architect, scope of services and compensation.