

Working with Consultants

Do We Need to Hire a Planning Consultant?

The following questions can help your community decide if it should work with a planning consultant to prepare the plan:

1. What is the issue, problem or project that your community must address?
2. What is the intended end product or result?
3. Does your community have the necessary expertise in-house? What expertise is lacking?
4. What resources are available from the county or regional planning commission (i.e. planning assistance, land information data, etc.)?
5. Would it be practical to hire permanent or temporary staff to prepare the plan?
6. What is the estimated cost of hiring additional staff compared to hiring a consultant?
7. Would hiring additional staff carry with it the possibility of a longer-term commitment than what is justified?
8. Would hiring a consultant add objectivity, prestige or credibility to the project?
9. Is there political controversy connected with the project? If so, would the presence of a consultant help to defuse it?
10. Does the project require a detached, objective or innovative approach?

What Should We Look For?

If your community decides to work with a consultant, it should prepare a concise request for proposals (RFP) and interview a small group of planning firms. The following criteria can help you select a qualified consultant:

Professional Qualifications

Consultants have varying levels of staff and expertise. Review the names, titles, years of experience and work responsibilities of all staff assigned to the project. This includes staff associated with the lead consultant and all sub-contractors.

Past Experience

Review the consultant's work experience to make sure they have a proven track record on these types of projects and can complement the experience of existing staff and officials. Desired experience may include but is not limited to:

- Grant-writing.
- Preparation of comprehensive plans or other specific types of plans.
- Experience with marketing, public relations or public participation.
- Expertise in geographic information systems (GIS) and mapping.
- Preparation of land use codes.
- Other specialized knowledge such as real estate, historic preservation, architecture or community design.

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Proposed work plan

Review the consultant's proposal to make sure the proposed planning process, work plan, deliverables and timeline meet the unique needs of your community. Capacity to accomplish the work in the required time is often a critical issue for many local communities.

Knowledge of local planning laws

Review the consultant's experience working in Wisconsin. Consulting firms with limited experience in the state should be able to clearly demonstrate their understanding of Wisconsin planning laws and related requirements.