

CHOOSING YOUR ARCHITECT

1. *Name a design committee.* As soon as you have established the need for a project, set up a committee.
2. *Outline the project.* Start by agreeing on a project needs, goals, budget, and possible locations. Decide what matters most – speed, cost, design. Make a preliminary assessment of risk and repayment ability.
3. *Decide on a selection process.* Design competitions are appropriate for large projects and the usual method much preferred by architects is pre-qualification and interview.
4. *Make a preliminary list of architects.* Get a list of design firms asking associates and facility's managers for names. Prestige is less important than matching the architect with your scope of challenges. Send a "Request for Qualifications" (RFQ) to likely firms. This can be a simple letter describing the project and asking interested architects to respond with their credentials.
5. *Looking at the list of firms.* When you have received your RFQ responses and have reduced the list to no more than a half dozen candidates, follow up with a "Request for Proposals" (RFP) to help you decide which firms to interview. The RFP response will depend on how much information you have given the firm.
6. *Assessing the proposals consider the following by assigning a score from 1-5 for each question.*
 - a. Will the firm's principals work on the project day-to-day?
 - b. What is the firm's Budget and schedule tracking record?
Staying within the budget and time constraints are critical.
 - c. Size of firm and length of practice? Big firms have depth, but small firms just might give more personalized service.
 - d. Recent project history. Look for similar clients and building types
 - e. Location. Local firms have a decided advantage in dealing with local authorities and regulations. Distant firms can reduce their disadvantage by working with a local architect.
 - f. Special expertise
 - g. Knowledge of codes
 - h. Supervisory experience
 - i. Fee proposal
7. *Interviews.* Remember the design firms are used to interviews and don't be seduced by slides, models, and a lot of talk. Ask about the firm's approach to cost estimating and cost control, experience in getting local approvals and handling the bidding process. Ask about relations with the firm's engineers who will be hired by the architect
8. *Check references.* When you call the references ask about cost control, schedule compliance and problem solving. Find out which individuals worked on the project and speak to them. Your goal is to find out if the client would use the same architect again and why or why not.
9. *Choosing the right architect.* After all your interviews and calls to references, choosing the right architect is a matter of combining thoughtful questions with common sense. When your decision is made, notify the unsuccessful candidates and give each of them an explanation naming your choice of firm.