

How to Hire an Environmental Consulting Firm

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Hiring an environmental consulting firm is an important decision that can greatly affect your company. The fact that there are thousands of environmental consulting firms can make the elimination process seem overwhelming. To begin omitting unqualified firms, you must first determine what it is that you need. If you have never used an environmental consulting firm, it is a good idea to get referrals from other trusted professionals, the local regulatory agency or online.

If you are already working with a consulting firm, it may be helpful to objectively evaluate the service you are currently receiving to determine if further searching is necessary. Wherever you are in the hiring process, there are several important factors to consider before deciding on a consulting firm.

What is the consulting firm's expertise?

- Is the consulting firm familiar with the state rules and regulations that apply to the project location?
- Does the consulting firm seem genuinely interested in defining the project's objective as well as a potential solution?
- Is the consulting firm able to provide you with references?
- Is the consulting firm capable of completing a project of your size and scope of work?
- Does the consulting firm have a desired amount of experience with the applicable type of work?
- Is the consulting firm able to complete the project within the required timeframe?
- Has the consulting firm been sued for a mistake on a project?
- Does the consulting firm have licenses or certifications in the applicable states? The following are examples of licenses and certifications: Professional Geologist (PG), Professional Engineer (PE) and Certified Hazardous Materials Manager (CHMM). In addition, some states such as Florida, Tennessee and Texas also require an approved contractor.

After narrowing it down to two or three consultants, the next step is to call the references provided. Consider asking the references the following questions:

- Did the consultant complete the project within the scheduled timeframe?
- Was the reference satisfied with the consultants work?
- Was the project finished within budget? If not, were the change orders justifiable?
- Was the consultant's deliverable clear and concise?

Does the consulting firm act as an extension of your company?

- Did the consultant keep the reference abreast of the project's progress with appropriately spaced email or telephone updates? Did the consultant exhibit good written and verbal communication skills?

If the consultant is capable of completing the project, you may want to consider the following during or after the submittal of a proposal:

- Do I feel comfortable with the consulting firm?
- Did the consulting firm inquire about project expectations?
- Did the consulting firm's proposal clearly state the project's scope of work and cost estimate?
- Did the consulting firm deliver the proposal when promised?
- Did the proposal cover the project's regulatory program and guidance?
- Did the proposal establish a project timeline?
- Ensure all firms' proposals are using the same scope of work.
- Use caution when a firm drastically undercharges. Undercharging could suggest inexperienced consultants, low quality projects or the possibility of multiple change orders.

EXPECTATIONS

Your new or existing consulting firm should exhibit a sense of urgency for your project. The firm should show integrity in their interactions, and effective communication is a must. Does the consulting firm act as an extension of your company? Do you trust the consulting firm to take care of your needs?

CONCLUSION

Consulting firms should be regularly evaluated to determine you are getting the service, value and quality you require and deserve. Never settle for poor service and quality. Make sure the firm you choose will meet or exceed your expectations. The firm you choose should demonstrate urgency, integrity, communication, partnership and trust.

Please contact us at 800-805-6002, and a Sierra Piedmont team member will be happy to assist you with your specific project.