



architecture

How to Hire the Right Architect for Your Project

Public or private institutions, individuals or companies planning a construction project may be overwhelmed by the complicated task they face. An architect can guide you through the stages of planning, designing and constructing a project. Your building project represents a major investment affecting the productivity and efficiency of your organization for years to come. This brochure is designed to help you find the right architect for your project and understand the steps you should take along the way to maximize your investment.

It is never too early to hire an architect to help you make the critical decisions that get your project off to the right start. These decisions include: selecting a site, setting the requirements and vision for your project, determining budget and schedule, dealing with zoning and health, safety and welfare issues, and working with public authorities who will review your project. Architects are the only professionals with the education, training, experience and vision to help you maximize your construction investment.

The state of Minnesota requires plans and specifications for new building construction, major additions and remodelings be prepared and certified by a licensed architect or engineer. There are exceptions for single and two family dwellings, out buildings, farm buildings, temporary buildings for construction purposes and certain classifications of buildings below a specified floor area.

Defining Your Project

Defining your project begins with your needs and your vision. This is the pre-design phase. Hiring an architect to assist with the pre-design phase will help you determine these essential components:

- Project goals and objectives
- Functions and sizes of required spaces (your program)
- Project site
- Project budget and construction budget
- Project schedule
- Method by which you hope to complete the project (project delivery method)
- Project financing

An architect is of great value during this pre-design phase. But because you hire an architect to assist with this planning, it does not necessarily mean that you will work with that same architect through the rest of the project.

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Project Delivery Methods

During the pre-design phase, you should determine if you want to use a traditional method called “Design-Bid-Build” in which the architect works with you to design the project, which is then bid by general contractors, with the low bidder being awarded the construction contract. AIA Minnesota has a brochure describing the Design-Bid-Build method as well as other methods of project delivery such as Design-Build.

Finding the Right Architect

Your project should be a collaborative effort, involving client, architect, contractor, and other necessary project participants. You should select architects based upon their qualifications, negotiating the fee for service once you have selected a firm. It is difficult at the onset of a project to determine the scope and quality of the services that will be required, and it is generally not a good idea to select an architect based upon fee. A fee is best negotiated after determining the required scope of services.

Depending upon the size of the project, clients typically consider a manageable number of three to five firms to submit a proposal. Create your list of potential architects through the following process:

- Contact The American Institute of Architects Minnesota for a listing of AIA Minnesota member firms showing size and type of their completed projects, or visit their web site at www.aia-mn.org

- Contact owners who have developed similar projects and ask which architectural firms they would recommend
- Tour similar building/ facility types to understand problems that were encountered and solved
- Refer to the phone book for a list of architects

Architectural firms may be large or small, specialists or generalists. Consider the complexity of your project and whether it requires general or technical knowledge. This will help you determine which type of firm is best suited to your project. Large firms often work with in-house engineering staffs (civil/structural/mechanical/electrical) or other design disciplines such as planning, urban design, interior design, or landscape architecture; while small firms use consulting professionals to fit the needs of a specific project.

Selection Committee or Individual

Planning, designing and constructing a successful building project is a complex process demanding a coordinated and dedicated team approach. A selection committee or an individual should choose the architect. Public or institutional projects may require a building committee representing diverse interests. This committee may even include an architect. AIA Minnesota can help refer clients to architects who are able to provide this service. Sometimes an owner’s representative with design and construction experience, instead of a committee, may be best suited for the job.

Once you have defined your project, you will be able to determine if an architectural firm has the right qualifications to meet your objectives.

A Selection Committee should be a manageable size of five to seven people and able to make decisions in a timely manner. The committee should include someone who will use the facility on a daily basis, an individual qualified to judge the performance of the design professionals, and a representative of the design profession. Members of the committee should be objective and personally unaffected by their decisions. To serve as the best stewards for the owner, the committee should have continual involvement from planning stages through project completion.

Request for Qualification (RFQ)

An RFQ (Request for Qualifications) may be sent to potential architects to narrow a lengthy list of contenders. The RFQ should include a description of who you are, what you want to build, services required (architectural, engineering landscape architecture, furnishings), program, fee, construction budget, project schedule, and other relevant project information. AIA Document B431 Architect’s Qualification Statement, to be completed by the firm, will give you information on size and type of firm, related services they provide, representative projects, and references.

Request for Proposals (RFP)

Once the list of potential architects has been narrowed to a manageable size, the Selection Committee may draft an RFP (Request for Proposal). Like the RFQ, the RFP should describe the project as noted above. The RFP should ask for the firm's legal status, size, background, resumes of proposed project team members, billing rates, a statement of project understanding, the firm's approach to the project, how the firm will accomplish the work within the timeline you have specified, related experience, a portfolio of comparable projects, and references. Since it is a time-consuming process for an architectural firm to complete a Request for Proposal, send an RFP only to those firms you would seriously consider hiring. Responses should be made in a uniform manner to facilitate their review. Limit responses to 15-20 pages to focus the response and make comparisons possible. Give the architects a contact person to call with questions as they prepare their responses, and let them know where and when the proposal is to be delivered. State the number of copies required, a timeline and criteria for your selection process, how many firms will be interviewed, and when you will make your decision. A minimum of two weeks should be allowed to prepare the proposal.

Conducting an Interview

The selection committee should review the RFQ's and/or RFP's and prepare a "short list" of two to four firms to invite for formal interviews. Set a time for the interview allowing one to two weeks for a firm to prepare a presentation. Schedule interviews for 30 minutes to an hour to allow for presentation and questions. Start and complete interviews on time.

During an interview, the selection committee should meet the people who will actually be doing the work on the project. These people may include not only the partner in charge, but the project designers, and key engineers or consultants. An interview is an opportunity to gain insight on the dynamics between you and a firm, to see how your personalities and visions for the project mesh, and to gain a level of confidence in the team you choose to solve your problems. Ask questions about the architectural firm's design philosophy, their interest in and understanding of your project, the firm's design process and how they involve clients and user groups, and their history with design, schedules, and budgets on previous related projects. A project team that communicates and interacts well is more likely to produce a highly successful project.

The Steps Involved in Design and Construction

Once you have selected a firm, be sure to thank the non-selected firms, acknowledging the time and effort they spent on their proposal with a phone call or letter. Let them know who was selected and why.

The work between awarding the contract and designing and completing a project is exciting, interesting, rewarding, and challenging. With effort and conviction by all members of the team, your project will come together in the best possible way.

The selected firm, upon accepting your project, will prepare an agreement detailing the scope of work, services and responsibilities of the architect and owner, budget requirements, project schedule, and architect's fees. AIA architects use standard contracts that have been carefully modified and tested, and they are flexible enough to fit many purposes. Review the contract and ask questions as necessary to give you a clear understanding of its terms and of the roles and responsibilities of the parties.

Under an AIA Agreement B141 Standard Form of Agreement Between Owner and Architect, the architect generally provides what is commonly referred to as Basic Services. *The Pre-Design phase noted earlier is not considered a Basic Service.* This key group of design activities include:

- Schematic Design - The architect provides a preliminary evaluation of the program, schedule and construction budget developed in the pre-design phase and prepares a number of Schematic Design drawings illustrating the project to review with the owner. The designs lay out the program on the site and address schedule and construction budget requirements. The architect submits a preliminary estimate of construction cost to the owner.
- Design Development - Based upon the approved Schematic Design plans and required adjustments to program, budget and schedule, the architect prepares more detailed Design Development drawings describing the architectural, structural, mechanical and electrical systems, and makes adjustments to the preliminary estimate of construction cost.
- Construction Documents - Based upon the Design Development documents, the architect prepares bidding information, conditions of the contract, and an AIA agreement between owner and contractor. The architect advises the owner of adjustments to preliminary construction cost estimates and assists in filing documents for approval of governmental authorities.
- Bidding & Negotiation - The owner approves the Construction Documents and the estimate of construction cost. The architect assists the owner in obtaining bids from General Contractors, negotiating proposals, and preparing and awarding contracts for construction.
- Construction Administration - Representing the owner, the architect observes the construction and administers the agreement between the owner and the contractor, determines that work is done in accordance with the contract documents, and certifies the contractor's pay applications. The architect reviews shop drawings, prepares change order documents, determines a date of substantial completion, and issues a final certificate for payment.

With effort and conviction by all members of the team, your project will come together in the best possible way. We hope this brochure will prove useful to you in finding the right architect for your project.

Additional Information

For additional information please refer to the following AIA Publications:

- "Understanding Project Delivery," AIA Minnesota, 612-338-6763 or www.aia-mn.org for additional information regarding project delivery methods
- "Building Relationships," publication order no. N-1012, The AIA, Washington, DC, 1-800-AIA-9930 or www.aia.org, for additional information regarding hiring an architect
- "You and Your Architect," The AIA, Washington, DC 1-800-AIA-9930 or www.aia.org, for additional information regarding working with an architect

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