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Selecting Design Professionals for Public Library Construction

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Selecting Design Professionals for Public Library Facilities

Hiring the best qualified design professionals is critical to the success of any construction project. From the library consultant who works with the building team to the architectural firm which takes the concept from dream to reality, it is essential that all function as a unified team.

When a library first considers developing a construction project, there are several individuals who should be involved. The library board must support the concept, the library director should be a part of the team, along with various funding agency representatives and interested community members. Each plays a role in the process and this becomes the building team for the life of the project. There are three critical hires for the building team: the library consultant, the architect, and the interior designer if not a part of the architectural firm. The team's first hire should be a library consultant who works to determine the goals of the library, the spaces that might be included in a new or renovated facility, and specific needs of the project. The consultant will develop the written building program, and may assist with the completion of grant application forms and provide advice on site selection.

The library consultant may also work with the team to select an architect. The process for finding a consultant, architect, or interior designer is much the same in that the team begins by building a list of professionals. There are several ways to find a qualified design professional – talk to librarians across the state, find out who designed projects in your community that you particularly like, and ask questions. The Georgia Public Library Service Construction Office can suggest qualified professionals in Georgia and nationally. Architects must be members of the American Institute of Architects, AIA, which indicates a professional code of ethics and specific educational and experience criteria. Lists of architectural firms may also be identified in *American Libraries* and *Library Journal's* annual construction issues. The Request for Proposal, RFP, is a key tool for learning more information about the knowledge and relevant experience of the design professionals. It is recommended that a separate RFP be issued for the Building Consultant, the Architect and the Interior Designer.

Building a new library or planning an expansion is an expensive investment for the community and the first step in the process is the building program, which should be developed by an experienced professional librarian [Georgia requires that a librarian write the building program]. A building program is a written description of the library's needs and includes detailed requirements for each area of the library and approximate space allocations and relationships. Included in the plan may be strategic planning documents, a history of the library program, and demographic analysis of the community. It will also include a space by space description of the functions taking place in future building and will include many details including furnishings, technology needs, personal space, acoustics, lighting requirements and any other special features unique for the community.

The architect will take the consultant's written program and expand it into the preliminary design for the new building. The building program statement is the first step in securing approval to proceed with a building project. Depending on the funding sources and local requirements, the next step in the process is to develop an RFP for Architectural Services. Selecting the architect is a critical decision for

the Team. Included in the RFP should be statements that clarify the project and define specifically what is expected of the architect. Information should include:

- Introduction to the Process and Design Parameters including a description of the project, estimated budget and any other relevant background information.
- Deadline for submittal of a response to the RFP--no bids will be accepted after this time.
- How to Submit Your Proposal to the Building Team, number of copies required, where proposals will be received, other relevant information. What signatures are required, does any document have to be notarized?
- Name of Contact Person with the firm responding to the RFP.
- Any other information the Building Team would need to have for a decision.
- Qualification of the architectural team.
- Previous designs of the architectural team of similar scope to the intended project.

The RFP should also request information about the Scope of Services including exact information about expectations of the design professional. This information might include:

- General information and background of the firm completing the response
- Architectural planning, permitting, engineering, interior and other design services that would be included in the project
- Develop construction bid documents
- Construction administration; how the project will be overseen and who will do the day-to-day supervision.
- Estimated schedule of activity. The Building Team should know approximately how long the proposed design work will take. Part of the schedule should include: a) Review Program; b) Site Evaluation and Survey; and c) Geotechnical Review.
- Contract management of general contractor during the actual construction of the building.

Proposal Requirements

In response to the RFP, architectural firms will include a brief letter of introduction and interest in the project including the relevant work experience, references, and availability for the project. While a decision will not be made based on the project budget, it is important to have design professionals include a detailed budget proposal that includes information regarding what services will be provided. This section will include information about interior design services if that is to be included in the package or information about coordination with a separate firm. Engineering firms and other design consultants that will be on the architectural team and the fees allocated for these services should be specified as well. Other documents that may be required are: cover letter, business information, project understanding, the project team members from other firms and their business information, project schedule, and any additional services required along with a schedule for reimbursable fees, allowances, and services outside the general proposed architectural contract.

Very important to the process is the need for the architectural firm to provide a list of reference projects (3-5 projects that represent the team's approach to developing solutions for similar scale projects).

Client name, telephone number, description of the project, and key personnel are essential. Another requirement is that the team has prior experience with library planning, design, construction, and renovation projects. At least two projects should be public library design projects completed in the past five years. Architectural firms may submit examples of public government buildings of similar size and scope; however, it is most desirable to review architects that have experience with and fully understand the design needs of a public library. LEED experience and consultants to be used if LEED certification is part of the scope of service also are required.

One final factor, but perhaps not the most critical, is the method of compensation. Many firms will quote a flat fee for architectural design services. Others will quote a percentage of the estimated construction cost. The important factor is to determine what services are included and what services are considered “extra.” All fees should be discussed in the proposal and are subject to negotiation during the contract phase. Make certain that the fees cover every contingency and that you ask about them during any interview.

Evaluation Criteria and Selection Process

Included in the RFP should be a statement of the evaluation criteria to be used. Proposals will be evaluated by the building team and a short-list of firms will be developed based on the criteria below. Short-listed firms will be invited to an interview.

Some proposal evaluation criteria to be developed by the Building Team:

- Firm’s experience in designing library projects, similarly sized facilities, and other projects.

- Qualifications and experience of the design team to be assigned to the project.

- Firm’s understanding of the overall project, project schedule, and proposed approach.

- References and specific projects that would be comparable in size and budget to the project.

- Current work load and staff assignment.

- Responsiveness to the RFP.

Once the building team receives the response to the RFP, each team member independently ranks them. The short-listed firms will be invited to interview with the building team. A sample evaluation form is appended.

Interview

The following are sample questions that may be used during the design team interview. If the interior designer is a part of the design team, he or she should be a part of the interview process. Who attends the interview and conducts the interview? The building team should set the time for the interviews, develop parameters, and ask the same questions of all applicants. Follow-up with firms may vary, but the same general questions should be asked:

1. How will you use the building program to guide the project's development? How will you gather information about our needs and goals for this building?
2. If your firm is awarded the contract, how will you work towards schematic design?
3. How busy is your firm? Does it have the ability to meet the requirements of this job? How many projects are you able to handle comfortably and what is your project load in the next two years?
4. Who will actually design the library? Who will we be dealing with directly? What is his or her experience in creating a facility of this size?
5. What is the firm's design philosophy? What do you see as important design issues for this project? What are the specific challenges for this project?
6. The efficiency of the operations of the library will require an understanding of how libraries function. How have you handled circulation, technology needs, RFID, and other functions in previous projects?
7. How will you establish priorities and make decisions? What would you expect the library to provide during this process?
8. What fees can we expect? If the scope of work changes during the life of the project, how will these changes be handled and will there be additional fees? What are your defined reimbursable items and the fee structure? Do you use allowances?
9. What is your preferred type of contract: flat fee, fee as stipulated, percent of construction costs, fee as a stipulated sum, cost plus fee, other? How do you handle contract management?
10. What environmentally friendly procedures do you implement in design and construction? How can we insure that the project will be energy efficient and sustainable?
11. What sets this architectural firm apart from the rest?
12. What is your firm's track record with cost estimating? How do you bring a project back into budget? What services will you provide during construction?
13. With changes in information delivery, libraries need to be flexible. How have you addressed this issue in your previous work? How do you provide adequate technology infrastructure for future growth?
14. RFID technology, radio frequency identification, is an emerging trend with self-check stations, security, and other functions. How are you addressing this development?

And finally, there is one intangible that must be considered – rapport with the building team.

By developing a uniform approach to hiring design professionals, the building team will be well on their way to a successful project. The RFP is the basic tool to gather information and to evaluate the proposals submitted. Ultimately, the process must culminate in the interview and firms selected to provide service must be the best possible match in philosophy, experience, and chemistry.

ATTACHMENT: 1. SAMPLE GRID FOR SCORING RFP

FIRM NAME: _____				
EVALUATION CRITERIA	POINT RANGE	POINTS AWARDED	TIMES WEIGHT	TOTAL SCORE
Firm's Experience in designing other lib. projects renovation projects, others of similar size	1 thru 20		x 4	
Qualifications of key staff to be assigned to the Project including sub-consultants; Firm's apparent capability to do work and within the required time	1 thru 20		x 4	
Understanding of the Project, Schedule, Requirements and ability to perform work	1 thru 20		x 3	
References including applicable past work for other libraries	1 thru 20		x 2	
Current work load and staff assignments	1 thru 20		x 1	
Responsiveness to RFP	1 thru 20		x 1	
Total Score =				

Comments: Evaluator provide written narrative to support recorded score:

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.
- f.

Evaluator's signature and date

ATTACHMENT 2. SAMPLE GRID FOR SCORING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Name of Submitting Firm:			
SCORING WORKSHEET FOR: Phase 2 (Interview)			
Design of ABC Library		Possible Points	Points Scored
1	Their answers and overall presentation was well organized and they presented their team in a manner that created great confidence in creating a successful project. 0 - would be not well organized and difficult to follow; 1 - would be organized and easy to follow. 2 - excellent organization and instilled great confidence.	2	
2	There were members of their team, subcontractors, and/or partnered firms present at the interview and they took part in the presentation in a manner that you recognized them as being a part of the team. 0 - the lead architect did all the talking with no support from other team members; 1 - some, limited involvement of team members; 2 - the team members were an integral part of the presentation.	2	
3	The answers to your questions and the questions of others made you feel as though the team understood the questions and they answered the questions to the complete satisfaction of yourself or the person asking the question. 0 - questions had to be repeated or restated or they were not really answered; 1 - they were able to answer some of the questions easily and to your satisfaction; 2 - they answered all of the questions to the best satisfaction of yourself and the rest of the Board Committee.	2	
4	From the standpoint of creating a "green" facility that would become LEED certified, the team created confidence in you that they were knowledgeable about this topic and that LEED construction will really would not be an issue and would become a natural part of the project. 0 - they did not adequately address, explain or know about this issue; 1 - green	2	

	<p>construction and LEED was discussed but you are unsure of their full knowledge or commitment to this type of construction; 2 - you feel that they are fully knowledgeable about green construction and LEED -- you are confident in their ability to design such a building.</p>		
5	<p>Their description of how the team will interface with the Library in developing the facility through interviews, meetings, conferences, or other programming type measures, left you with confidence that they were going to listen and incorporate the ideas of the Library and Board of Trustees and staff into the design. 0 - you feel that they had not addressed this sufficiently or might not readily seek input; 1 - it was discussed but you still have concerns that they will listen to us; 2 - you want to work with this group based on their description and responses because you think they will implement our desires at the same time design a great building.</p>	2	
6	<p>From a cost viewpoint the team addressed the issues of cost control and indicated the measures they would use to make maximum use of the funds provided and at the same time make sure there was not budget overrun through the life of the project. 0 - they did not realistically discuss this issue; 1 - they did discuss the issue but did not generate confidence that they would be in control of this issue; 2 - you feel that they are very mindful of the cost component of the project and will maintain excellent overview of costs and implement cost control when necessary.</p>	2	
7	<p>At the completion of the interview you had a positive feeling that the working relationship between the team members would be positive for the success of the project. If the lead architect was partnering with another architectural firm to provide more depth and/or manpower to design the library you understood the relationship between the two organizations and who was going to be doing what through the life of the project. If there was no partnership planned and the firm was utilizing all in-house staff, then the question is whether you believe the experience of that</p>	2	

	<p>group or team is sufficient and there is great coordination, resource and depth of experience and expertise to successfully address our project. 0 - there is a lack of partnership or team cohesiveness; there is a lack of experience with the group; 1 - the partners were there or the team was there but there is perceived to be limited ability to work cohesively; there is no depth of experience among the partners or team; 2 - the partnership or team would be a value to the library and they have great depth of experience and knowledge.</p>		
8	<p>Did the team present some preliminary thoughts about the project either through preliminary conceptual drawings or descriptions of similar projects and you felt these preliminary plans or thoughts were very applicable to our project. 0 - you do not think they had done much preliminary work or had given much thought to our project; 1 - they have done some work to familiarize themselves with our project; 2 - they have done a great deal of preliminary work to understand our project, shared those thoughts and you like it.</p>	2	
9	<p>Did the team ask the Board Committee good questions that indicated they had a good understanding of the project as it currently exists and were the questions appropriate at this interview? 0 - they asked no real questions; 1 - they did ask some questions but nothing in-depth or to show exceptional interest in the project; 2 - there was a good exchange of information with their questions, the questions were really appropriate and they are really interested in the project.</p>	2	
10	<p>From the view point of designing a building that would contain a modern computer system for a Library you believed they are capable of designing such; 0 - they are not very conversant or knowledgeable concerning computer systems or electronic information; 1 - the did discuss this issue and they knew some things about computers and electronic information networks, but you were not impressed; 2 - you feel that they are very knowledgeable about computers and</p>	2	

	<p>electronic information and are very informed on the topic of how computers are integral to libraries.</p>		
11	<p>There is a strong desire to be able to operate the library with a minimum staff and implement cost efficiencies in design. Did they answer this in the interview and did you come away with the belief that they understood this and had some methods to address these issues? 0 - they did not adequately answer this issue; 1 - they answered the question but you did not think they really had in-depth thoughts on how to address the issue; 2 - they answered the question and had some good ideas about how to deal with the issue.</p>	2	
12	<p>Did the team ably answer all of the questions in this interview? 0 - they did not answer the questions well or in a complete manner; they did not understand a number of questions; 1 - the team answered the questions of the interview in an adequate manner; 2 - the team answered all questions completely and in a manner that made you confident in their abilities to design our library and manage the general contractor and actual construction of the building.</p>	2	
13	<p>Does the team understand the real function of the public library and the services we offer to the public? 0 - They only moderately know what a public library does; 1- They are fairly knowledgeable of what a public library is and the services we offer; 2 - you feel that the team is thoroughly aware of the function of public libraries in society and the services that public libraries offer to the public.</p>	2	
14	<p>Has the team successfully designed a public library facility of our size and nature? 0 - They have designed public buildings but not a public library; 1 - The team has designed a public library facility, but not similar to our size project or has not worked with a project financed with state funding; 2 - The team has constructed a public library facility similar to our size of the ABC Library and has worked on</p>	2	

	a project financed with state construction funding.		
15	Subjectively, how much did you like the team and how much do you want to work with them to design the ABC Library? 0 - Don't want to work with them; 1- it would be OK to work with this team; 2 - I really want to work with this team as they excite me and I think that they will design a great, relevant building for us.	2	
16	At the conclusion of the interview do you believed that the architectural team will provide the library with a successful design and that they have the best assembled team with experience and expertise to construct the ABC Library? 0 - you do not think that the team can design the best building or have relevant expertise or experience to build our branch library; 1 - you think that the group can design the branch library and they have the experience and expertise to do it; 2 - you think that the team will design a great building and have excellent credentials to manage the project.	2	
TOTAL POINTS		32	
TOTAL POINTS RECEIVED			

Resources:

AIA Long Island Chapter. "Beginner's Guide to Selecting an Architect."

www.aialongisland.com/arch_guide/beginners_guide.htm.

AIA Ohio. "Hiring an Architect."

aiaohio.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=79&Itemid=67.

Athens-Clarke County Library. Request for Proposals. Athens, GA, August 28, 2006.

Holt, Raymond. Wisconsin Building Project. Madison, Wisc. 1987.

Lushington, Nolan. Libraries Designed for Users. New York: Neal-Schuman. 2002.

Morabito, Patrick J. "Hiring an Architect."

www.pjmarchitect.com/hiringAnArchitect/questionsToAsk.php.

Newton County Library System. Architectural Scoring Sheet. Covington, GA, April 2008.