

How to select and obtain the best from a consultant?

What is the starting point?

1. Prepare a clearly defined brief and specify the deliverables
2. Define the scope of the brief including any constraints
3. Define the timescale and method of payment
4. Define your role as the client representative the process and who else will be involved and any time constraints which they might have

What do I do next?

1. Short list no more than 3 consultancies who are qualified to carry out the assignment
2. Seek written proposals including:
 - The brief
 - The names, background and experience of those consultants who would carry out the assignment
 - Experience of the consultancy in similar projects
 - Tasks, deliverables, time scales
 - Working methodology, e.g. workshops, progress meetings, formal reviews
 - Input required from you, the client
 - Fees, expenses and payment schedules

How do I choose the ideal consultancy?

1. Ensure that the company is technically competent and that the consultant has the appropriate experience
2. Make sure the chemistry is right and that you can work with the consultant
3. Ask for relevant references and follow them up

How do I obtain the best from the consultants?

1. Assignments are most effective where it is a joint effort between the client and the consultancy team with regular review meetings
2. Allow sufficient time for these communications
3. Involve your team in the communications. They are more likely to support the outcome and ensure that it works. It's all about ownership.
4. There should be no surprises in the final report

Most frequently asked questions

How are the fees calculated?

The fee is normally a function of the time allocated and the seniority of the resource engaged on the assignment. There are normally two methods of charging:

1. A fixed fee normally made up of the number of days estimated for the assignment multiplied by a day rate where the day rate includes payroll costs, overheads and an element of profit.
2. A variable fee made up of a day rate, normally agreed in advance, multiplied by the number of days actually worked.

What activities are involved in the day rate?

The following list includes the key elements of the work:

- Meetings with client, or other relevant external organisations
- Preparation of project drawings and other graphic material
- Writing, editing and processing reports
- Presentation of reports
- Technical work on the contract
- Desk top research
- Site visits
- Survey work
- Data processing
- Travelling in connection with the work

How are expenses charged?

1. Out of pocket expenses incurred directly as the result of an assignment are normally charged extra from the fee element.
2. The nature of the charges are normally agreed in advance but may include:
 - Travel
 - Accommodation & subsistence
 - Visas or other legal requirements
 - Purchase of maps, plans and other documentation
 - Data processing
 - Telephone calls where there is heavy usage or overseas usage
3. Consultants will normally provide an estimate if requested.