



## How to Hire and Work with Consultants

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Interviewing Consultants  
Questions to Ask Your Prospective Consultants

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### INTERVIEWING CONSULTANTS

The interview process isn't mysterious. Essentially, you'll be conducting your interviews with prospective consultants in the same spirit and format that has successfully served you in the past to fill staff positions.

Nevertheless, there are some crucial differences. Given the broad impact that the consultant can have on your organization, you may want to assemble a *more diverse interview team* -- including the executive director, senior staff, a board member, and other people whose working relationship with the consultant will have a direct impact on the success of the project.

You should interview *at least two prospective consultants* -- even if you have already identified a probable candidate for the job. Talking in depth with consultants from different backgrounds who may have different approaches or techniques will help you refine your own understanding of your organizational dilemma, while simultaneously allowing you to compare the candidates' respective merits. During the interviews, make certain that you *ask each candidate the same questions* so that you can establish a fair standard for comparison.

As with most evaluative tasks, your ability to gauge the consultant's skills will be informed by your own degree of organizational self-knowledge. In the best of all possible worlds, you would be able to define your group's problem, stipulate the background, expertise, and services you're seeking, and characterize the kind of relationship you want to cultivate with the consultant for a prescribed period of time. In reality, you may find that you need to hire a consultant initially to help articulate the problems you face. Indeed, this is inevitably the first step in solving them.

As you interview your candidates, pay attention not only to their answers -- but also their personal manner and professional style.

#### **GOOD LISTENING**

Does the consultant pay attention to what you're saying and respond appropriately -- or does he only talk about his own accomplishments?

### **PRACTICAL DISENGAGEMENT**

Does it seem that this candidate will be able to provide the objectivity you need in an outside expert?

### **BROAD EXPERIENCE**

Does your candidate have relevant experience to draw on in helping put your issues in perspective?

### **INSIDE INFORMATION**

Does the consultant grasp your mission and organizational style? Has he bothered to learn anything about your group prior to the interview?

### **QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR PROSPECTIVE CONSULTANT**

What *strengths* do you possess that will prove particularly helpful in connection with this project?

Have you worked on *similar projects* or consulted with other groups facing problems similar to ours? What did you learn from the experience? What would you do differently if you could repeat the experience?

How would you describe the challenges we face from the limited amount you now know about us?

Describe your *work process*. How would you work with our staff, board, and executive director?

Are there other members of your *consulting team* who would be working with you? Who are they? How would you propose to divide up the tasks among your team members? When can we interview them?

What *problems* do you anticipate as we begin to work together? How can we best address these problems early on?

Talk about the responsibilities we must assume in order to make our work together successful.

Are you available to complete this work during the time we've specified?

And finally: What else should we be asking you? What else should we know about you, your experience or about what it would be like to work together?