

Fact Sheet

B-2.2 Selecting an Industrial or Environmental Consultant

Starting a waste reduction project using resources at hand makes good financial sense. However, if your project is complex, hiring an industrial or environmental consultant to supplement your internal capabilities may help you complete the job in a thorough and efficient manner. The skills and areas of expertise that consultants offer vary greatly. For this reason, selecting a consultant requires careful research, starting with an assessment of your own needs.

Assess Your Needs

Begin assessing your needs by reviewing project objectives, making sure they are specific and well defined. Determine what parts of your current operations meet these project objectives, and what parts do not. Then, develop actions or steps needed to meet your project objectives. Make certain that you document how changes — such as process or product changes, materials substitutions and disposal cost reductions — will affect business operations, profitability, and regulatory requirements.

When determining your project objectives, ask the following questions:

- ! How much of the project work can be done by your company?
- ! How much of the project work is beyond your company's capabilities and must be done by another company?
- ! What resources are available free of charge through equipment vendors and publication information sources, such as libraries and public technical assistance programs (university extension services, government agencies, trade associations, etc.)?
- ! How much money can your company devote to the project?
- ! What are the project's projected cost savings and payback period?
- ! What is the company commitment to the project? Is it willing to make changes that will affect production processes?
- ! What is the timetable for completing the project?

Understand the Consultant's Role

Once project objectives are determined, compare your situation and needs to services that consultants offer. A partial list of services generally provided by consultants includes:

- ! Expertise in certain areas.
- ! Objective assessment of your situation.
- ! Help with interpreting regulations.
- ! Temporary supplement to your staff resources and knowledge base.
- ! Technical and economic analysis of alternatives.
- ! Development of recommendations.
- ! Design and engineering support.
- ! Assistance with equipment selection and purchasing.

- ! Assistance with implementing operational changes and startup.
- ! Completion of one-time projects.
- ! Performance of annual tasks, such as facility reviews.

Although environmental consultants can provide many services to improve your company's operations and productivity, remember that you are the experts about your company. Consultants can only enhance your expertise. Do not depend on consultants to provide the following:

- ! **Decision Making:** You need to evaluate what will work for your business.
- ! **Purchasing Specific Products:** Find out if the consultant receives compensation when you buy recommended products through them. The product they recommend may not be the most cost effective.
- ! **Standard Services:** Generally, consultants are hired to provide customized solutions for clients.

Find the Right Consultant

After your company decides that consulting services offer the resources you need to implement your project objectives, begin the process of identifying the consultant that will best meet your needs. For example, if your project involves process changes, find a consultant that has appropriate design engineering experience. To find the right consultant, do the following:

- ! **Obtain referrals:** Contact local companies with similar operations, trade associations, legal counsel, regulatory and state agencies, or consultant referral services.
- ! **Do your homework:** Contact consultants directly to identify their expertise and their interest in your project.

Prepare for your First Meeting

Before you meet with prospective consultants, you should do the following:

- ! Prepare a report describing your project objectives and your current operations.
- ! Identify the experience that each consultant has on projects similar to yours.
- ! Obtain references from each consultant to verify the work. Checking past work performance is one of the best ways to evaluate a consultant.

When you meet with each of the consultants, be prepared to do the following:

- ! Explain how much of the project objectives your company can accomplish both with and without consultant assistance.
- ! Define what you want the consultant to do, but explain that their opinions are welcome. An outside perspective on your situation is valuable.
- ! Identify your project timeline.
- ! Find out who would be working on your project.

At the end of the meeting, request a proposal from each consultant based on the information you provided in your report and during your meeting. Be sure to provide more information when requested by the consultants. Clear communication at this stage is important to help ensure your getting the results you want.

Review the Proposals

When reviewing a proposal, make sure that it answers the following questions:

- ! Has the consultant responded to your principle needs based on your outlined objectives?
- ! What services are specific to your project?
- ! Is a project timetable included that covers both consultant time and your company's personnel time? Is the timetable reasonable?
- ! Are all fees and equipment costs clearly explained? Are billing procedures included? Are the fees reasonable?

A consultants's written proposal should also include the following:

- ! Responsibilities of your company's personnel.
- ! Responsibilities of the consultant(s).
- ! Personnel assigned to the project, including their experience levels and billing rates.
- ! References relevant to your project. (Ideally, references should be obtained prior to meeting with the consultants.)

Avoid Misunderstandings

The following are issues most frequently neglected by companies when hiring a consultant. Consider addressing these issues in your contract or letter of agreement:

- ! Use of subcontractors: Does the consultant use subcontractors and assess a commission for their services?
- ! Liabilities and insurance: Who provides the necessary insurance coverage?
- ! Licenses and certifications: Are they needed? Does the consultant have them?
- ! Additional expenses: How will unforeseen expenses be handled? Will you be contacted before these expenses are incurred?
- ! Work site and space: Will the consultant need a substantial amount of time on-site? Is there adequate space for the consultant to work while at your company?
- ! Confidentiality: Will the information that is accessible to the consultant be kept confidential? If so, a nondisclosure clause must be in the contract.
- ! Timeline: What are the project milestones? When should reports be submitted and the project completed?

Sources for Referral and More Information

Additional information about hiring environmental consultants is available from the following resources:

- ! Trade and professional business associations.
- ! Legal counsel.
- ! Other companies in your industry.
- ! County or university extension agencies.
- ! Regulatory and state government agencies.
- ! Better Business Bureau.
- ! Yellow Pages.
- ! Trade magazines and journals, such as *Pollution Engineering*.
- ! Dun's Consultants Directory provides listings of consultants by area of expertise and location. This directory is updated annually and is available in the business reference section of public libraries.