

Finding, Selecting, and Working with Consultants

As your organization considers using a consultant, the organization must first take the time to be clear about what it wants and needs as well as what success will look like at the end of the project. Plan ahead, this process can take time. With this in mind, the following guidelines may be useful in selecting a consultant.

- Clearly define your consulting needs: write a brief description of 1) the situation or organizational challenge; 2) your Management Consulting Fund or Organizational Development project focus; and 3) general requirements for the consultant, such as years of experience or areas of expertise.
- Collect the names of potential consultants from others – colleagues from other arts or nonprofit groups, Springboard for the Arts, MRAC, Minnesota Council of Nonprofits, Nexus, and/or your board members. Your MRAC program director can help identify potential consultants.
- Select two or three consultants to interview who best fit your situation, grant focus, and requirements.

Selecting a consultant

- Contact your selected candidates to determine their interest and availability, briefly describe your group, situation, proposed project focus, and timeline. Set up a short interview with each candidate to further discuss your project. Ask the consultant to send you a resume/biography and client list. (If your candidate is not available, ask for names of other consultants who might fit your needs).
- It is really important to MRAC that your potential consultant has previously worked with organizations of your size.
- Prepare for your consultant interviews. The project leader from your group should prepare questions in advance and attend each interview.
- Check references for your final candidate(s).
- Make your selection. Consider not only experience, expertise, and fee but also your ability to work well together.
- Work with your selected consultant to “fine tune” the project focus, agree on project definition and goals, and specify action items for a succinctly stated work plan.

- Create a well-designed project with clearly defined roles, responsibilities, and outcomes.

Maintaining a good working relationship

- Be respectful and let your consultant know if you are funded or if your grant request was unsuccessful.
- Sign a contract before you begin work. Include in the contract your grant application/work plan, payment schedule, evaluation checkpoints, and the conditions under which you may cancel the contract.
- Plan on working many more hours than the consultant. To be effective, the consultant will need time – your time – to learn about your group and its issues. At least initially, the consultant is likely to increase your workload.
- Keep your expectations of yourself and the consultant realistic. Make certain that there is agreement on specific project outcomes.
- Whenever possible, ask the consultant to act as a coach or trainer so you learn by doing.