



SERVICE PROVIDER GUIDE

Overview – Selecting a Green Professional

Selecting the right design professionals and builders is an essential step in undertaking a successful green building project. Experienced green professionals will help you realize your goals and help ensure the project is a financial and environmental success. This guide is assembled help you in this important decision-making step.

The process of designing and building green is fundamentally different from traditional approaches. Its integrated, collaborative approach requires early and ongoing involvement by all parties, including owners, architects, engineers, builders, operators and occupants. This increased level of collaboration provides an atmosphere conducive to discussing goals, brainstorming innovations, increasing design synergies and minimizing obstacles. Involving inexperienced professionals may cost less compared to experienced professionals, but these savings may quickly erode due to the time needed to get a firm up to speed on building green, costs of having correct mistakes or having to replace an inexperienced professional altogether. In comparison hiring experienced professionals will help insure a smoother project, produce a better learning and collaborating experience, and yield an attractive return on investment. Identifying skilled and experienced design professionals means being able to communicate your wants and needs. This requires some basic knowledge of green design.

Getting Up To Speed

Spend some time researching the subject of green design, construction and facility operations. How little or much you do this is up to personal preference. Start by investigating and compiling print and electronic media including books, magazine articles and the Internet. There are also local organizations like the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) that offer advice and seminars in building green. Explore the overall concepts first, next researching the specific elements of green building that most interest you.

Design checklists and software tools exist and are valuable resources for building your knowledge base. One regional example is the City of Boulder's Green Points Program. It features a checklist-based rating system that encourages cost-effective and sustainable building methods, conservation of natural resources, recycling of construction materials, reducing solid waste and improved indoor air quality. The program offers great ideas for building a green project, while allowing flexibility to tailor selections to specific designs or buyer preferences. An example of a software tool is the Green Building Advisor. It is a computer program created for architects, designers, planners, students, and educators who want to evaluate the environmental opportunities of specific projects or learn about the many elements of green building design. It also proves invaluable for those hiring design services- private companies, government agencies, and owners who are planning to build and want to make sure they and their designers are aware of green building opportunities. Good software programs will recommend strategies specific to the user's project, will communicate benefits and drawbacks of implementing each strategy, evaluate conflicts and synergies between design strategies, and perform a life cycle assessment. Life cycle assessment is an internationally accepted method of evaluating environmental impacts of a product, process or activity throughout its full life cycle; namely, from extraction of raw materials, to processing, transport, use and finally disposal. Software can be costly, so work within your budget. Look for professionals that already have a copy of the software you are interested in or are willing to purchase it and you can work with it together. How hands-on you get is up to you.

Identifying the target market(s) for your project and examining the building's function will help you prioritize green design elements for each project. You may want to focus on alternative transportation, low-emitting materials or construction waste management. Perhaps designing a net zero energy building with a green roof is a primary goal. Maybe incorporating certified wood products or rapidly renewable materials is a must have element of the project. If these terms are unfamiliar to you, you have some work to do. You have to know what you want in order to ask for it.

Finding A Professional.

Once you have a pretty good comfort level with the concepts of green design and the general philosophy of your project, begin to build a list of possible professionals. Survey friends and acquaintances that have been through the process. Find out who designed projects you like. Within the general category of green, each firm has its field of specialization, such as commissioning, energy efficiency, site sustainability, or green materials. Furthermore a firm may also have building sector specialization, such as office, mixed use, or industrial. You may wish to start with finding a green architect or green project coordinator and then work with the project coordinator to expand the search for engineers, materials consultants and builders. Search the USGBC website for members and LEED accredited professionals. Review project case studies. You may want to narrow the list down to a short-list of three or four firms to make the process manageable. Contact each firm and set up an interview.

Choosing the Right Professional.

Look for demonstrated experience.

What is the professional's/firm's experience with sustainable design / green building? Ask for them to provide specific projects in their portfolio that are similar to your project, and provide references you can talk with. Describe your project and ask for a statement of qualifications. Does the person(s) who will be working on your project have formal education in green design and/or construction? Do they participate in continuing education? Look for applied experience in the areas you wish to incorporate into your project and individuals that share some main principles of your philosophy.

Look for evidence of commitment to and involvement with green building.

Visit the professional's office. Does the professional/firm have green design literature, software, product data, or material samples in the office? Ask for a tour of the library, and whether they have subscriptions to green design magazines/journals or fee-based online resources. Do they have a set of specifications tailored to the construction of green buildings? Ask for a list or a tour of their favorite web sites.

Make sure professionals practice what they proclaim.

How is the business operated? Is a recycling program in place for office waste? Are green office products purchased and building technologies implemented, such as environmentally friendly office supplies, recycled building materials and energy efficient building systems? Do they purchase green-power? Are alternative transportation options encouraged? Do they have a telecommuting program or home-offices? When interviewing prospective contractors, ask what programs exist to ensure worker health and safety on the jobsite and if the contractor recycles on the jobsite.

Ask questions.

How busy is the firm? Does it have the capacity to take on your project? Meet the person(s) who will actually design your project as well as those whom will be your point of contact. What is the firm's design philosophy? Is the firm licensed and bonded? What is the fee structure? Is the professional and firm a member of green design organizations or participate in any community or industry programs?

Consider the interpersonal element

Do you like the person(s) you will be working with? You'll be working with them for a long time, and you'll be interacting frequently so look for individuals with whom you feel comfortable. The integrated design approach requires interaction between team members consistently throughout the process. This doesn't require you be friends, but there should be fundamental, mutual respect and honesty within the business relationship. Do all parties communicate well? Do you feel heard? Are your ideas, wishes and requirements incorporated into the project?

Finding the right design and construction professionals will ensure that the project fills your needs and the process is as smooth and fun as possible.