

GROUND

GAINING

A Facility Development Initiative
for New Jersey's Charter Schools

Selecting Your Architect

Whether you are building your own home or designing a commercial complex, choosing the right architect is vital to a successful project.

Architecture firms come in a variety of sizes and types. The statistically average firm is made up of 9 or 10 people; many firms are smaller. There are also very large firms with staffs of 100 or more. Some firms specialize in one or more project or facility types. Others have very specific specialties. Some firms include in-house engineering (structural, mechanical, electrical, etc.) or other design disciplines (planning, urban design, landscape architecture, interior design, etc.) Many architects introduce specialty disciplines into their projects through appropriate consultants. Each architecture firm brings its own combination of skills, expertise, interests, and values to its projects. All good architects will listen to you and translate your ideas into a viable construction project. Look for a good listener and you'll find a good architect.

The Right Architect

If you are a first-time client, or an experienced client facing a new situation, you probably have many questions about architect selection. Some of the more frequently asked questions are addressed here.

When, in the life cycle of a project, should I bring the architect into the picture?

As early as possible. Architects can help you define the project in terms that provide meaningful guidance for design. They may also do site studies, help secure planning and zoning approvals, help you work out financing, and a variety of other predesign services.

Should I look at more than one firm?

Usually, yes. One obvious exception is when you already have a good relationship with an architect and it makes little sense to change.

How do I find suitable firms to contact?

Contact other owners who have developed similar facilities and ask who they interviewed and ultimately selected. Ask who designed buildings and projects that you've admired or that seem especially appropriate. Many local chapters of the American Institute of Architects maintain referral lists and are available to assist you in identifying architects who can help you. (Look in the *Yellow Pages* for the AIA listing, or go to www.aia.org.)

What information should I request from firms?

At a minimum, ask to see projects the firm has designed that are similar in type and size to yours or that have addressed similar issues (for example, siting, functional complexity, or design aspirations). Ask them to indicate how they will approach your project and who will be working on it (including consultants). Ask for the names of other owners you may contact.

Why are formal interviews desirable?

An interview addresses one issue that can't be covered in brochures: the chemistry between the owner and the architecture firm. Interviews also allow the owner to learn how each firm plans to approach the project.

How many firms should I interview and how should they be selected?

Most people advise that you interview three to five firms--enough to see the range of possibilities, but not so many that an already tough decision will be further complicated. Interview architecture

Source: The American Institute of Architects | www.aia.org