



Selecting an Architect

Architects selected to work on a supportive housing development project must be registered or licensed in the state in which the project will be developed, and should have experience with similar types of projects. Prospective architects should be asked to provide at least three letters of reference regarding past performance on projects of similar type and size. The architect's role typically includes representing the owner's/developer's interests with the general contractor, and with any engineering or architectural staff representing the funding agencies during the predevelopment and construction phases of your project.

It is important to ensure that a prospective architect will design a supportive housing building that will provide the best possible environment for its tenants and that will be relatively easy to maintain over the long term. The screening of prospective architects might include asking the following questions:

1. What is the architect's approach to design? When designing a project for people with special needs, it is important that the architect understands how those needs might influence their design. If they haven't already designed a project for the target population, they should be eager to do the research necessary to understand the population better.
2. What is the architect's approach to balancing issues of maintaining a reasonable cost structure and attaining aesthetic design goals.
3. What subcontractors, if any, would the architect anticipate using on this project for mechanical and electrical design, landscape design, structural engineering, and site design and engineering? What other services would he/she anticipate providing through a subcontractor?
4. What is the architect's experience in working on politically controversial projects? What was the result? Did the project get built? What was the architect's role in resolving the controversy?

As with all prospective consultants, it will be equally critical to talk to the architect's former clients - in the case of an architect, it should also be possible to tour completed projects in his/her portfolio. It is definitely worth the time to see other buildings that the architect has designed, and it would also be beneficial to talk to people who are now working and/or living within those projects. Some questions you might ask an architect's former clients include:

5. Was the architect's performance of consistently high quality?

Note: This document is included within the *Development and Finance* section of CSH's *Toolkit for Developing and Operating Supportive Housing*, which is available at www.csh.org/toolkit2. This document has been adapted from CSH's publication *Family Matters: A Guide to Developing Family Supportive Housing*, which is available at www.csh.org/publications.

1. What was the architect's role in the design review/planning approval and community outreach process?
2. Was the architect responsive to the client's design needs? Is the client happy with the building's design? Is the client happy with the finishes that the architect selected?
3. Are there any major maintenance problems due to decisions made by the architect?
4. How did the architect respond to problems during the design and construction period?
5. How many change orders were there during construction? Were the approved change orders within your contingency budget?
6. Did the architect complete the project within the budgeted contract amount?
6. Was the project completed within the contract construction period?