



# How to Choose an Architect

Finding, Selecting, and  
Engaging an Architect

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Photography: Robert Hill

## Introduction

A successful construction project fulfils your desires as the client, meets the needs of the users, and contributes to the general well-being of the environment. Such a project is the result of an effective working relationship between you and your architect.

Architects are trained to help you realize your objectives and guide you through the design and construction process. In particular, architects will help you through the complex regulatory building process including zoning bylaws, building codes, and contractors' bids.

Education, training, and professional experience enable the architect to transform your ideas into design solutions that meet functional needs. The architect—who serves as advisor, coordinator, and technical manager, as well as creative artist—can design and administer a contract resulting in a project that is completed on schedule, within budget, and to a high standard of quality.

*Selecting the right architect is one of the most significant decisions you can make.*

## The Profession of Architecture

To become a licensed/registered architect in Canada, an individual has to successfully complete:

- specific educational requirements;
- several years of monitored experience in all aspects of practice; and
- extensive examinations.

In Canada, the respective provincial legislatures have authority over regulating the profession of architecture. Legislation in each province gives authority to the provincial architectural association to administer, in the public interest, the *Architects Act*. Through that authority, the provincial architectural association regulates the conduct of the profession. An architect or architectural firm which breaches ethical standards can have its membership or licence to practise suspended or cancelled. You can obtain copies of the respective provincial association statutes, bylaws, and regulations from the corresponding association's office.

*Architects are permitted to practise the profession (i.e., offer and provide architectural services and advice to clients) only if they are licensed/registered in the province in which they practise.*

## Provincial Architectural Association Offices

### Architectural Institute of British Columbia

100-440 Cambie Street  
Vancouver, BC V6B 2N5  
Tel: (604) 683-8588  
Fax: (604) 683-8568  
E-mail: [aibc@aibc.bc.ca](mailto:aibc@aibc.bc.ca)  
<http://www.aibc.bc.ca>

### Alberta Association of Architects

Duggan House Building  
10515 Saskatchewan Drive  
Edmonton, AB T6E 4S1  
Tel: (403) 432-0224  
Fax: (403) 439-1431  
E-mail: [info@aaa.ab.ca](mailto:info@aaa.ab.ca)  
<http://www.aaa.ab.ca>

### Saskatchewan Association of Architects

642 Broadway Avenue  
Suite 200  
Saskatoon, SK S7N 1A9  
Tel: (306) 242-0733  
Fax: (306) 664-2598

### Manitoba Association of Architects

137 Bannatyne Avenue  
2nd Floor  
Winnipeg, MB R3B 0R3  
Tel: (204) 925-4620  
Fax: (204) 925-4624  
E-mail: [info@mbarchitects.org](mailto:info@mbarchitects.org)

### Ontario Association of Architects

111 Moatfield Drive  
Toronto, ON M3B 3L6  
Tel: (416) 449-6898  
Fax: (416) 449-5756  
E-mail: [oaamail@oaa.on.ca](mailto:oaamail@oaa.on.ca)  
<http://www.oaa.on.ca>

### Ordre des architectes du Québec

1825 boul. René Lévesque Ouest  
Montréal, QC H3H 1R4  
Tel: (514) 937-6168  
Fax: (514) 933-0242  
E-mail: [oaq@videotron.ca](mailto:oaq@videotron.ca)  
<http://www.oaq.com>

### Architects' Association of New Brunswick

1 Pleasant Avenue  
Unit A  
Sussex, NB E4E 1X2  
Tel: (506) 433-5811  
Fax: (506) 432-1122  
E-mail: [klcaanb@nbnet.nb.ca](mailto:klcaanb@nbnet.nb.ca)

### Nova Scotia Association of Architects

1361 Barrington Street  
Halifax, Nova Scotia B3J 1Y9  
Tel: (902) 423-7607  
Fax: (902) 425-7024

### Architects Association of Prince Edward Island

P.O. Box 1766  
Charlottetown, PE C1A 7N4  
Tel: (902) 566-3699

### Newfoundland Association of Architects

E5204, Station A  
St. John's, NF A1C 5V5  
Tel: (709) 726-8550  
Fax: (709) 726-1549  
E-mail: [naa@public.nfld.com](mailto:naa@public.nfld.com)  
<http://www.netfx.iom.net/naa>

# How to Find an Architect

## Sources

You can find an architect in a number of ways, including:

1. *Request and review* a copy of the directory, if available, which is produced by some of the provincial architectural associations. Such directories contain summary information on how to find every practising architect or practice in the province. The directory may also include the following information: a firm's principals; year of establishment; profile of completed projects; staffing; and significant commissions and awards.
2. *Visit* architects' Web sites.
3. *Ask* provincial associations for a list of practising architects or their firms which meet certain broad criteria related to your project. As well, you may be able to visit the offices of various firms to review portfolios of their work.
4. *Use* your own experience to nominate architects that have served you well in the past.
5. *Ask* for recommendations from other organizations or persons who may have had similar projects.
6. *Advertise* in a local or province-wide publication, such as the provincial association's newsletter or Web site. If you choose to advertise, you can use the suggested wording shown in the sample advertisement in the next section. The provincial association may also be able to help you prepare an advertisement.

You will find the process easier if you keep the list of potential architects to a manageable number. For a small project, two architects may be sufficient; ten or more may be appropriate for a large, complicated assignment.

*You can use a variety of methods and sources to find an architect for your project.*

## Sample Advertisement

**Architects**

**Statement of Qualifications**

**The Mountainville Regional School Board is seeking the services of an architect for the design of a 15-classroom addition to Mountainville High School. The construction budget is \$1,250,000.**

<p>Interested architects should submit the following information <b>ONLY</b>:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Name, size, and description of firm.</li> <li>2. Location of office.</li> <li>3. Résumé of members of the firm who would be available for the assignment.</li> <li>4. Previous experience with similar work.</li> </ol>	<p>This is <b>NOT</b> a request for a proposal. An architect will be selected following submission of proposals, interviews, and evaluations.</p> <p><b>Contact:</b> Mr. Harry Dault c/o Mountainville Regional School Board Mountainville, BC V7V 1M8 Telephone: (604) 925-3457 Fax: (604) 925-3455</p>
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Advertisements should include the following information:

- name of the client's organization;
- name of the project;
- a brief description of the project, including size and value; and
- contact person: name, address, phone.

# How to Select an Architect

## Methods

Selecting an architect is one of the most important decisions you will make when undertaking a project. You may use one of the following selection methods:

**Direct selection** is most often used by an individual who has a relatively small project. The client selects an architect on the basis of reputation, personal acquaintance or the recommendation of a friend, former client or another architect. Sometimes, institutions maintain a roster of architects, and they select a different practice for each project by using a rotation system.

**Architectural design competitions** are sometimes used to select both an architect and a design for both public and private projects. In this method, architects submit solutions to a particular problem and are judged on the comparative excellence of their submissions. The successful architect is usually awarded the commission for the actual project. Competitions may be “open” (to all architects) or “limited” (by invitation to a restricted number of architects).

If you are considering a design competition, you must obtain written approval from the provincial association. Architects are permitted to compete only when they are assured that the competition will be held in accordance with rules established by the Committee of Canadian Architectural Councils (CCAC). See rules for Conduct of Competitions in:

- the CCAC's *Document Five, Canadian Rules for the Conduct of Architectural Competitions*; or
- a guide on architectural competitions published by the Ordre des architectes du Québec.

These rules have recognized procedures which ensure equal treatment and anonymity of competitors, provisions for different types of competitions as well as advice about process, schedule, and likely costs. The provincial association can help you develop acceptable terms and conditions.

**Quality-based selection (QBS)** is one of the most common methods of selecting the right architect for the project. In particular, institutions, corporations or public agencies (sometimes represented by a committee) use this method. QBS is a system that chooses an architect on the basis of professional qualifications and competence. This procedure will provide your project with the best-qualified architect with whom you can develop a professional relationship. Such a relationship is very important for the kind of in-depth discussion which allows the architect and the engineers to deal effectively with issues on your behalf.

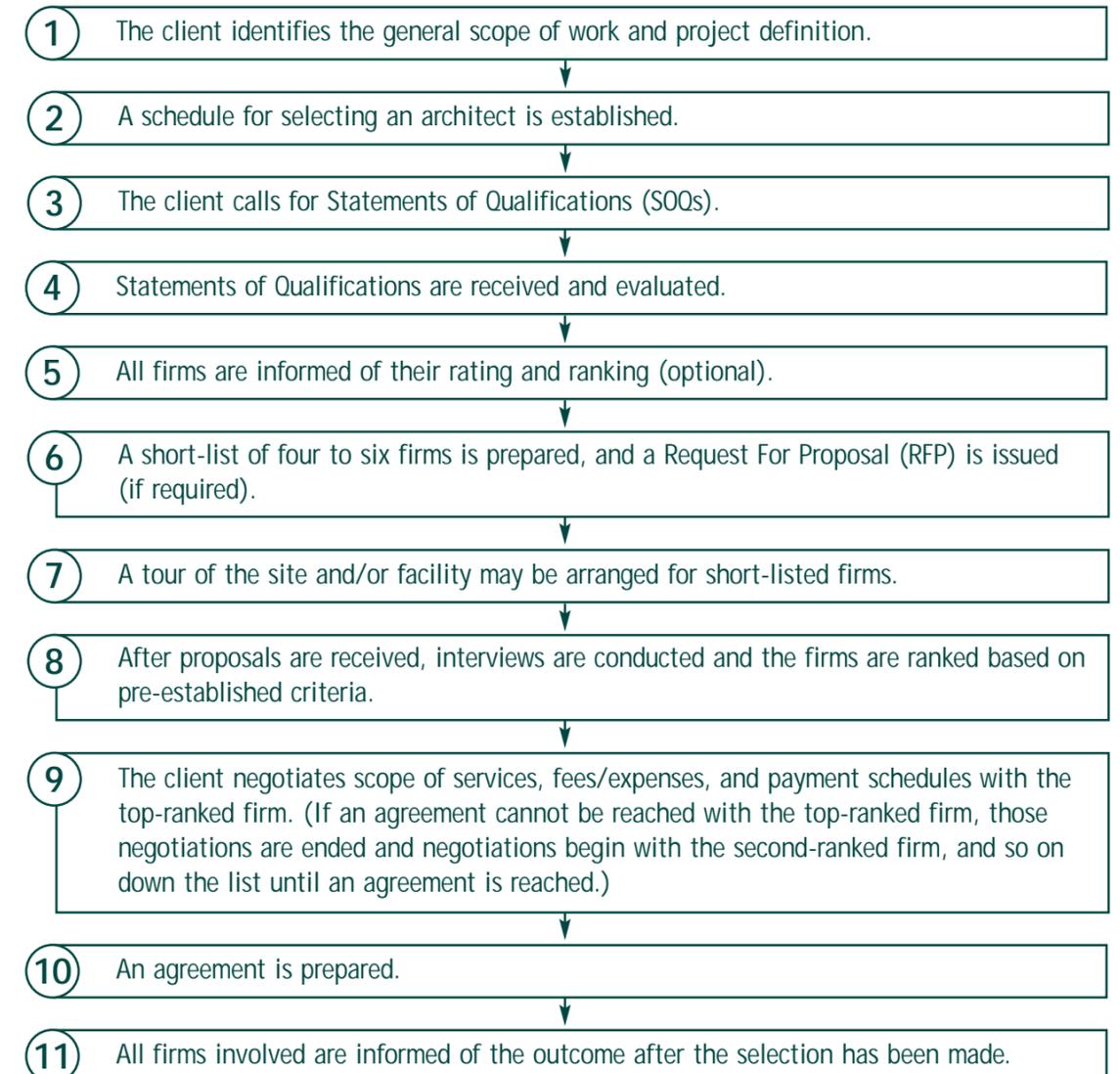
To achieve an objective comparison, QBS uses predetermined, value-based criteria that may include such factors as:

- the architect's history and capability to perform required services;
- related experience such as past performance on similar types of projects;
- familiarity with local geography and facilities;
- experience and skills in project management; and
- design approach/methodology.

The process compares two or more architects. The client (or committee members, if applicable) makes a selection based upon their judgement of which architect is most likely to handle the project successfully. Other criteria include:

- reputation;
- rapport;
- technical competence;
- commitment to the client's interests; and
- the client's desire for imagination and ingenuity.

#### The QBS process usually includes all or part of the following steps:



Once an architect has been selected because of his or her demonstrated qualifications to perform the work, you can then negotiate a fair fee with that architect. Some provincial associations publish appropriate scales of professional fees to help clients and architects in determining fair amounts.

**Select an architect by using the method that is most appropriate to your circumstances and needs.**

### Why are architects not selected on a competitive bid basis?

If you are a prospective client experienced in the procurement of commodities, you are accustomed to obtaining competitive bids for goods you purchase. You may wonder why the same procedure is not used to procure architectural services. The answer is simple. You are not a “customer” buying a product off the shelf. Rather, you are hiring architectural advice and ability for a customized building or project that is not yet determined. When seeking an architect’s creative, technical, and management skills, the most appropriate way for you to ensure that your project has the best possible expertise is through analysis of credentials and qualifications, not by the lowest fee.

Competitive bidding does not permit the architect to help the client determine exactly what services are required. At the start of an architectural project, it is difficult for both the client and the architect to define the exact nature and scope of services to be performed because it is not possible to foresee all professional services, technical knowledge, judgement, skill, and decision-making. Together, the client and the architect define and delineate the scope of these services as part of their discussions, often as the project evolves.

## How to Engage an Architect

### Client-Architect Agreements

It’s in your best interests as a client to have a definite understanding with the architect about your respective obligations, responsibilities, and expectations. This understanding is most effectively accomplished by a thorough review of:

- the scope of the services to be provided by the architect;
- the projected time period for the work to be completed;
- the amount of the architect’s fees; and
- the method of payment for the architect’s services.

When you and the architect have fully discussed and agreed upon these items, a written contract outlining all of these factors should be prepared.

Agreements based on recognized standards are preferred, and the use of the *Canadian Standard Form of Agreement Between Client and Architect: Document Six* (National Practice Program, 1997) is recommended. For those projects where only limited services are to be

provided or when the full standard form is not practical, the recommended alternative is the *Canadian Standard Form of Agreement Between Client and Architect—Abbreviated Version: Document Seven* (National Practice Program, 1997).

The agreements set out the services to be provided by the architect. They also identify your responsibility as the client to provide the following information:

- the requirements for the project under consideration;
- physical specifications (such as spatial and functional relationships);
- legal services;
- site aspects (such as surveys, subsurface investigation reports, etc.); and
- the schedule for payment of fees.

You can obtain copies of these agreement forms through the provincial association.

Note: these documents are written for provinces with common law; they must be adapted for use in Quebec (or the standard documents prepared in Quebec may be used).

**The use of the Canadian Standard Form of Agreement Between Client and Architect: Document Six (National Practice Program, 1997) is recommended.**

### The Architect’s Services

Traditionally, architectural services included design, preparation of construction documents, and construction administration. Currently, architects also provide a wide variety of services including problem-solving, feasibility studies, facility management, and architectural programming. An Appendix to this document summarizes some of the services provided by an architect.

Whether the building type is simple or complex, the architectural service must be conceived and coordinated as an integrated whole, with strict attention paid to quality, time, and cost. All services should be defined in the agreement. The scope of services will vary with:

- the nature and complexity of the individual project;
- your planning and development capabilities;
- the project’s particular requirements; and
- circumstances not foreseen at the time of the initial agreement.

**Identification and valuation of the architect’s services is important to the success of the project.**

## The Services of Sub-Consultants

The services of a structural engineer, mechanical engineer, and electrical engineer—which are often essential services—are usually managed and coordinated by the architect.

Hiring these sub-consultants can be done in one of two ways:

1. Traditionally, the architect—acting as a prime consultant—hires engineering sub-consultants and is responsible for the design of the entire project including work carried out by these sub-consultants.
2. Today, the client sometimes hires these engineering professionals directly and needs the architect to coordinate their services; such arrangements should be discussed with the architect in further detail.

In either case, it is important for the success of your project that the architect—who is uniquely trained and experienced in this regard—be responsible for the overall management of sub-consultants throughout the entire project. This enables the architect to produce well-integrated results by coordinating both the design and administration of the project.

As the property owner, you are responsible for providing information about the property (or project site). Thus, you are responsible for directly hiring the investigative and design services of specialist sub-consultants such as land surveyors, geotechnical engineers, environmental analysts, hydrologists, and civil engineers. Your architect is entitled to rely on their input. You are also responsible for providing legal and insurance services as well as paying for translation, arbitration, and expert witness services should the need arise.

Sometimes the services of other specialist sub-consultants are necessary, depending on building conditions and other factors. These services might include advice in fields such as:

- market analysis;
- financial feasibility;
- functional programming;
- cost control and energy budgets;
- acoustics;
- food services;
- interior design;
- graphic design; and
- landscape architecture.

*Sub-consultants bring special expertise to the project.*

## Fees and Expenses

An architect's fees are made up of two elements:

1. *fees* for architectural services (the major component); and
2. *reimbursable expenses* for out-of-pocket expenses (such as travel and communications, and reproduction of contract documents).

After you and the architect reach agreement on the extent and nature of services to be provided for the project, the architect's fees can be determined in several ways, including:

- lump sum (fixed fee);
- time basis (hourly or per diem rates); and
- percentage (of construction cost).

Combinations of these methods may also apply for:

- different aspects of service on the same project;
- limited services; or
- the evolving nature and scope of services during the life of a project.

Frequently, the client pays a retainer to the architect upon signing of the agreement. Usually, the amount of the retainer is based on a percentage of the total amount of the architect's fees.

For more complete information regarding payment methods and recommended rates, you should refer to the provincial association's recommended schedule or tariff of fees. That document, including specific scales of fees, is updated from time to time. Confirm that you are consulting the current edition.

*Appropriate fees ensure appropriate architectural services.*

## Copyright

Payment of the architect's fee gives you the right to use, once and for the intended purpose only, the plans, sketches, drawings, graphic representations, and specifications prepared by the architect as instruments of service. However, the copyright and ownership of both the design and these instruments of service belong to the architect and you may not use them for any other project, sell them or offer them for sale (or as part of a sale of property).

*Architects' designs are protected by copyright.*

## Conclusion

A construction project is a major undertaking involving the collaborative efforts of a number of professionals. Finding, selecting, and engaging the right architect for your project is critical to its functional, aesthetic, and financial success. Your architect provides advice and design solutions, oversees the process, handles the unexpected, and brings value to a project by taking care of your interests and ensuring a quality product. Building rapport with your architect is an important element of the process. In the final analysis, you should choose an architect whose work you admire, whose expertise you trust, and with whom you feel most comfortable.

*Your building project is important to you, so take the time to choose an architect who can help you realize your dream.*