Hiring a consultant - a practical guide for local groups

If you are looking to hire a consultant you will have established a need for some work to be completed that is beyond the scope of your current resources. This paper provides advice when hiring consultants.

Project Schedule
It may be useful for you to draw out a project schedule before you begin looking to hire a consultant, this should include:

- Objectives – What are you trying to achieve?
- Methods – How are you going to do it?
- Timescales – When?
- Cost – How much?
- Where – will the consultant be local – easy to contact/meet with?
- Who – Do you have someone in mind?

A good method of ensuring that the project is effective is to make sure the objectives are SMART.

S Specific
M Measurable
A Achievable
R Reviewed
T Time bound

The consultants brief
Writing a clear and concise outline brief for your potential consultants to consider is very important. Although you may want to use the experience and expertise of the consultant to refine a proposal, you need to be clear enough in the brief to ensure you get the right consultant for the job.

Provide the consultant with clear and thorough information about your local group. Clearly spell out why you need a consultant, what you hope they will achieve and the time scales and methods you require. Be specific about the experience and skills you require as well as details of the available budget. A good format for a consultants brief is at this site www.hfpg.org/cdb/how_consult.htm it is called a ‘request for proposals (RFP)’.

Finding the right consultants
The most comprehensive list of environmental consultants is produced by www.endsdirectory.com. You can search for a consultant by either the ‘category of work’ or by their ‘client experience’.

It is important to talk to other organisations that have used consultants such as NACVS (www.nacvs.org.uk) and to talk to the umbrella bodies, many of which keep lists of good consultants.
It is not compulsory but always important to talk to more than one consultant, unless you have considerable experience of working with one individual or group. Tendering ensures you are getting best value for money and the consultant with the most desirable skills for the work. You will need to develop selection criteria based on what you deem the most important factor(s).

Consider whether or not you want to engage an individual or a group. There can be pros and cons with either approach. With an individual you know that you will get the attention of one consultant who you can get to know; with a group you may get a range of different skills.

**Short listing your consultants**
The standards you set in appointing a consultant will obviously vary according to the nature of the work. You should look for the following points:

- How will they conduct the consultancy
- Recognition that your brief has been understood and analysed
- A realistic timescale which matches the consultant’s availability to your needs
- The skills you require
- An understanding of your local groups values and culture
- An understanding of where your local group fits in the community
- An appropriate fee for the work and skills on offer how they will monitor and evaluate.

**Once your consultant had been chosen**
It may be sensible to write a confirmation letter listing the following:

- Services to be provided by the consultant
- Specific reports or presentations that are anticipated
- The beginning and ending date of project
- The fee for the service and hourly rate
- As you begin working with the consultant, be sure that you agree upon the objectives of the project and the method of evaluation to be used at its completion. Allow for change in the approach if necessary.

It is advisable to collect references for the consultant you have chosen. They should have no problem giving you details of companies they have previously worked for that you can then contact for a clearer picture on the consultants abilities and performance.

**Evaluation**
Evaluating the success of the consultancy may be useful for future reference. Use your original targets, this way you can see what was actually achieved. If some of your targets were not achieved you may be able to realise why and maybe give some useful insight for other local groups to access.

**Hiring a consultant who is also a member of your local group**
If there is a member of your local group who has a professional expertise and earns their living from a service which would benefit your local group, for example, as a web designer or environmental consultant, you could consider asking them to tender for the work on offer.

**Links**
http://community.foe.co.uk/local_groups/running_your_own/resource/fundraising/
www.trainersandconsultantsdirect.org.uk
www.hfpg.org/cdb/how_consult.htm
www.endsdirectory.com
www.nacvs.org.uk