



Community Ownership Fund
support programme



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Engaging professional advisors when acquiring or adapting your building

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Introduction

Organisations need to engage with a professional advisor when undertaking projects involving building acquisition, renovation, alteration, or even a completely new build. Professional advice will be essential at various stages of project implementation.

A board should always seek professional advice when necessary to fulfil its responsibilities and due diligence.

Advisors should be selected based on their qualifications and relevant experience and should provide evidence of their qualifications and experience when requested.



Finding a professional advisor

The professional advisor needed will vary depending on the type and scale of project and the specific issues surrounding it, the stages of the project, and the skills and resources already available to the organisation taking forward the project.

Many will belong to professional bodies and associations which may provide lists of their members in your area, along with their qualifications and range of expertise. Some associations may provide example contracts and terms of appointment. Some of these are shown below in the section on different [types of specialist advisors](#).

It may be possible to get recommendations from local projects which have undertaken similar projects. However, it is important to go through a fair and transparent selection process.

Selection and appointment

Any selected advisors should be suitably qualified, adequately insured, and have relevant expertise. Where possible, it is preferable to have knowledge and experience of working with the not-for-profit sector, although this may not be critical in all cases.

Check funding requirements

Some funders, and particularly if the funding is from a public source, will have regulations and/or other requirements around the procurement of professional advisors depending on the scale of the project and the fees involved, which must be complied with. This may be set out in the terms of the grant funding agreement or in other guidance.

Tendering

Most significant pieces of work will usually need to be put out to tender as part of the funding requirement and demonstrate due diligence on behalf of the organisation. The tender will provide a clear brief and specifications that allows like-for-like comparison, with the aim of securing a minimum of three bids to consider by a set deadline.

Small items of work might be commissioned without this process where there is a clear rationale for doing so and this provides good value for money.

Creating a brief

Preparing a brief is not only guidance for the specialist advisor, but also an opportunity for the organisation to take a step back to fully think through what is needed and the outcome you wish to achieve from the advice. Creating a brief allows you to clearly iterate this in a written document everyone can refer to throughout the process.

Building professionals are experts on buildings and land, the people involved in your organisation are the experts on what you plan to do and what you need from the building. Bear this in mind throughout the process of developing the brief and working with your chosen building professional/s.

The brief should set out the following:

- details of your organisation, management structure, and lead contact,
- the background and the land/building that is being acquired or developed,
- the objectives of the project and the intended beneficiaries of the project,
- the current stage the project is at,
- the detail of the advice you are seeking and any specific concerns or issues that you need to be addressed,
- a timeframe for responses to be received and for the delivery of the advice,
- an indicative budget for the work or at least having that to hand if asked.

Scoring and deciding tender responses

Responses to a tender should be scored against clear criteria in a scoring matrix so the final decision can be defended if challenged. You may want to weight the criteria in the scoring process to account for the most important priorities.

Whilst those offering the lowest price may seem to be attractive, this cannot be the only criterion. This is particularly true where there may need to be a creative and constructive dialogue during the process, such as with architects. In these cases, it may be useful to hold interviews with a shortlist of candidates to assess their understanding of the brief further and whether they would be a good working partner in the process.

It can also be useful to ask for and take up references.

Other relevant criteria to the decision-making process include:

- their understanding of the brief and quality of their response,
- relevant expertise,
- experience of working with the not-for-profit sector,
- the detail of their costings and being clear about what is, and what is not included (e.g. attendance at meetings and travel costs),
- their proximity to the project and availability to attend meetings on-site or face-to-face with the project steering group or board where relevant.

Interviews are a useful way to assess whether building professionals can work effectively with you. Think about whether they listen to your priorities and concerns, whether you understand the information they give and their understanding of constraints on your organisation, such as budgets and timescales.



Costs

The way professionals charge can be different depending on the type of service. Some will charge by the minute, hour or day, with additional costs for travel or other expenses. Building professionals costs are often linked to the overall cost of the build contract. Almost all professional fees will attract VAT.

Some professionals, architects for example, will offer free (pro bono) advice in the early assessment stages of a project in the hope of recouping costs later through a formal contract when funding is available.

It is important not to formally commit to using a particular professional for future stages, as funders may want to see an open procurement process to ensure best value for money.

Fees charged by architects, quantity surveyors and structural, mechanical and electrical engineers on larger projects are often calculated as a percentage of the total contract costs, usually 10%-15%.

Types of professional advisor

Here are just some of the types of professional advisor you may need during a capital project:

- [Planning consultants](#)
- [Architects](#)
- [Building Surveyors and Quantity Surveyors](#)
- [Structural Engineers](#)
- [Project Managers](#)
- [Building Contractors](#)
- [Solicitors](#)

Planning consultants

Although not routinely used, a planning consultant might be useful if you are considering a development project that may be complex, risky, or unusual in some way, such as those in Green Belts or conservation areas, or when dealing with refused applications.

Consultants offer expert knowledge of planning policy, increased chances of success, and experience of navigating the planning system's politics, helping to refine plans, prepare applications, and manage appeals or complex reports like ecological surveys.

The Royal Town Planning Institute has a helpful [Online Directory of Planning Consultants](#).

Architects

Architects follow the [Royal Institute of British Architects \(RIBA\) Plan of Work](#) which organises the process of briefing, designing, constructing and operating building projects into eight stages and explains the stage outcomes, core tasks and information exchanges required at each stage.

Funders and loan providers will usually expect to see plans drawn up to Stage 2 or 3.

As noted above, some architects may offer an initial assessment and even some broad outline plans pro bono (free) in the expectation of getting paid work at the later stages of a project, if it goes ahead.

Architects often specialise in different building types such as public realm and residential. RIBA maintains lists of chartered practices with these specialisms along with other advice for working with architects. Useful RIBA resources include:

- [RIBA resources](#)
- [How do I work with an architect?](#)

Architects' fees will vary depending on the location and complexity of the project and level of service expected from them. Some architects will base their charges on a percentage of a total project cost, others as a fixed price lump sum or on a time charge basis.

How much or how little you commission an architect is up to you – from an initial design discussion through to the final delivery of the project on-site.



Building Surveyors and Quantity Surveyors

Building Surveyors can provide various surveys of buildings such as condition surveys, structural surveys, or valuations, along with other services.

Funders may expect you to have had a condition survey carried out. This enables you to demonstrate that your proposals will deal with any significant physical issues with the building.

Quantity Surveyors estimate the cost of materials, labour, and other resources needed for a project. They can also monitor spending, update budgets, and manage payments to contractors, as well as manage risk, value engineering and cost control measures. The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) has a helpful resource [What is a Quantity Surveyor?](#)

Quantity Surveyors may also provide guidance on Life Cycle Costings (LCC) or Whole Life Costings (WLC) of a building which will consider not just the immediate purchase or construction costs, but all other costs such as the long-term maintenance costs, over a specified period of analysis.

The difference between LCC and WLC is that LCC focuses only on the construction, maintenance, operation and disposal of the asset, whereas WLC also includes client and user costs, such as project financing, land, income and external costs (those not born by parties to the construction contract – such as tenants). The same rules and procedures, however, apply equally to WLC and LCC. RICS has a helpful resource [Life Cycle Costing](#).

Most surveyors are members of RICS. You can use their lists to [find a Surveyor](#).

Structural Engineers

A Structural Engineer may be needed to calculate the loads (forces and weights) on a building and for the specification of structural elements. They will often be brought in by an architect or builder at points in planning and construction.

Structural Engineers may be members of The Institution of Structural Engineers. You can use their lists to [find an Engineer](#).

Project Managers

Any build project will need a Project Manager who oversees the construction from start to finish. For anything other than small scale projects where it might be possible to project manage in-house, provided you have capacity and skills to dedicate someone to the role; it is advisable to use a professional Project Manager.

The Project Manager will work with you to ensure the project meets your requirements, managing design, procurement, construction, and final handover.

It may be that your architect can recommend someone they have worked with before, or that it is a service your Quantity Surveyor can provide.

Building Contractors

Some Building Contractors may provide a 'design and build' service or provide their own project management.

Trade bodies include:

- [National Federation of Builders](#)
- [Federation of Master Builders](#)
- [The Guild of Master Craftsmen](#)
- [Chartered Institute of Building](#) (for larger construction projects)

Solicitors

Solicitors may be needed for a variety of services including incorporation, charity registration, drawing up leases, sub-leases and contracts, and freehold acquisition of property.

Because of the range of interest areas, many solicitors' firms have specialists in a particular area of work. A solicitor who mostly conducts house conveyancing for example, would not be useful in charitable registration.

Solicitors charge by the hour and there are guidelines for the hourly rate which depends on seniority and location. The UK Government have [solicitors' guideline hourly rates](#).

As the charges are by the hour and minute, it is essential to be clear what you are asking a solicitor to do, and to get quotes for the work. If the work extends beyond what was expected, be sure to get fresh quotes at each stage. Phone calls, emails and letters all come at a cost.

You can find a solicitor via [Solicitors Regulation Authority \(SRA\)](#) or [The Law Society](#).



Managing professional advisers

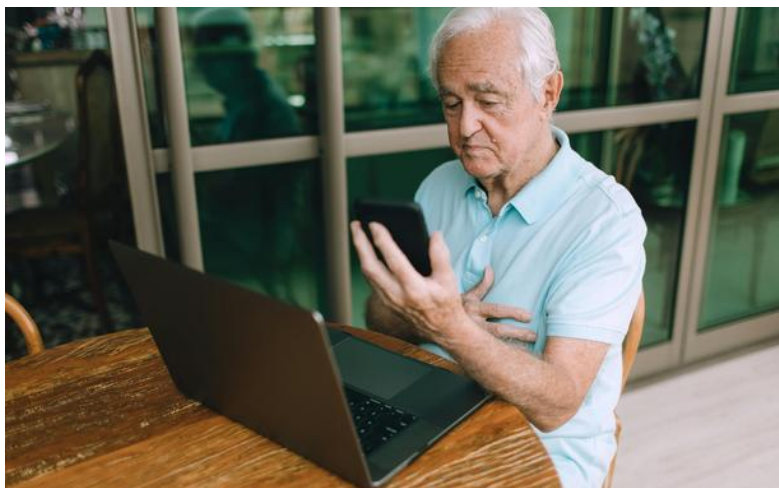
It is useful to have a key contact or a small group of staff/board members that is delegated to appoint and work with professional advisers.

As the client, you will be asked to make decisions, sometimes these will be urgent. It is not always possible or desirable to make these decisions at a board meeting. Having a key contact, or small working group who understand the project and can respond quickly is useful to avoid unnecessary delays. The key contact or working group should report to board at regular intervals.

Consider the implications of the advice you are given by professional advisers, for example:

- at the design stage, think about practicalities such as cleaning and maintenance. There is more information on this in guidance on [Assessing the feasibility of an asset project](#) which is on the [Asset Hub on My Community](#).
- at a later stage, you may receive advice about changing the specification to reduce costs. Check whether using different materials will add to long-term maintenance or replacement costs and whether there are any safety implications.

There can be confusion about the outcome of discussions on the phone, at meetings or at site visits. It is good practice to put the key points in writing and share them with everyone involved. Check minutes of meetings and site visits to ensure that they correspond with the decisions you understand to have been made. If communication is not clear and recorded, it may be impossible to rectify misunderstandings at a later stage.



Further resources

There are resources and webinars on the [Assets Hub on My Community](#) covering all aspects of acquiring, developing, refurbishing and managing community buildings.

These include resources:

- [Capital Funding Directory](#)
- [Writing a business plan for a capital project](#)
- [Assessing the feasibility of a community asset project](#)
- [Revenue funding sources to support project development costs](#)

Transforming Community Spaces webinars:

- [Securing funding for your capital project](#)
- [Renovating and adapting your space to meet community needs](#)
- [Taking your project from testing viability to a detailed business plan](#)
- [Why community engagement is key to your success](#)
- [Managing a community building](#)
- [Succession planning: community shares & community assets](#)
- [How community assets can benefit from climate action and energy efficiency](#)
- [Renting your space for the benefit of your community](#)

Locality believes in the power of community to transform lives. As the leading national experts on community assets, we help communities take ownership of land and buildings, manage finances and governance, and connect with others running similar spaces - [find out more](#).



Locality is the national membership network for community organisations that bring local people together to meet local needs. Locality supports local community organisations to be strong and successful, helping them to build a fairer society. Locality provides specialist advice, peer-learning, resources, and campaigns to create better operating conditions for our members.

Unlock the power in your community with us

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