

Local Preservation

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CHOOSING AN ARCHEOLOGICAL CONSULTANT

Local governments often find it necessary to obtain expert consulting services in archeology -- perhaps to assist in the conduct of a community-wide survey, to help document a particular historic property that has archeological features, or to conduct archeological survey work or data recovery in advance of a construction or land-use project. The following are some guidelines to consider in choosing an archeological consultant.

Where can archeologists be found?

In academic institutions in the United States, archeologists are usually found in departments of anthropology. Some archeologists may be employed in departments of classics, art history, or humanities, but these are usually "classical" archeologists who specialize in the archeology of such places as Greece, Rome, and Egypt and are usually not knowledgeable about the archeology of the United States. Most archeologists who do specialize in U.S. archeology are trained as anthropologists, and many are employed in anthropology departments, so the anthropology department of your local college or university is a good place to start looking. Archeologists are also often employed by historical, anthropological, and natural history museums.

Some academic institutions and museums have special research units that specialize in consulting work, or other work under contract to local State, and Federal agencies or private firms. These units are often called "cultural resource management" programs or "salvage archeology" units, and are usually attached to anthropology departments.

Some academic and museum-based archeologists are not particularly interested in working as consultants, however, and in many cases, you may find that your local anthropology department is more interested in studying African cultures than your local history or prehistory. You should never assume that you have exhausted all possibilities once you have checked your local universities, colleges, and museums.

In recent years a number of private consulting firms have been organized to provide archeological services. Some of these are non-profit institutes; others are profit-making firms. Many large architect/engineer firms have also developed archeological capabilities.

Government agencies are another source of archeological expertise. Agencies like the National Park Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the Forest Service, the Corps of Engineers, and many State parks agencies employ archeologists, who may be able to provide informal advice and assistance, or even work under contract if such work does not conflict with their official duties.

Finally, there are many "avocational" archeological organizations that do highly competent work, and often specialize in the archeology of particular areas. If there is such a group in your area, it may be able to provide excellent service at low cost.

The State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) is an excellent source of information on where to find an archeological consultant, and can also help you with recruitment, evaluation of qualifications, proposals, and fees, and with the design of archeological contracts. You may also find it helpful to consult the Directory of Professional Archeologists, published by the Society of Professional Archeologists (SOPA). It should be noted, however, that not all archeologists have applied for certification by SOPA, so there may be highly qualified archeologists in your area whose names do not appear in SOPA's Directory.

What should I look for in a consultant?

Relevance to the work at hand. The archeological consultant should have knowledge and skills appropriate to the work you need to have done. For example, if you need assistance in evaluating the site where an old mill is reported to have stood, you will want to obtain the services of a specialist in historical archeology -- the archeological study of sites created or occupied since the coming of Europeans to America. On the other hand, if you are undertaking a survey to identify sites representing your community's prehistoric Indian cultures, you will probably want to consult a specialist in prehistoric archeology -- the archeological study of prehistoric cultures. If you are seeking an archeologist to excavate a site that is threatened by a Federally assisted construction project, such as a project funded using Community Development Block Grant funds, you should be sure that the consultant understands the laws and regulations under which such work is done (e.g. Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, the regulations of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and relevant regulations of the Federal agency involved).

Experience and education. A healthy mix of experience in your local area, or at least in your State or region, and advanced education is important. Your prospective consultant should have an MA or PhD in anthropology, archeology, or a closely related field. At the same time, the prospective consultant should be able to demonstrate substantial experience in the archeology of the area, the State, or similar regions. If the archeologist does not have such experience, he or she should have people on staff with such experience.

If the consultant will be expected to work with the SHPO, prepare National Register nomination forms, evaluate properties for possible inclusion in the Register, or conduct work to help an agency comply with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, experience with Federal and state historic preservation programs is very desirable.

The consultant should know how the State historic preservation program is organized and should understand National Register and Section 106 procedures. Prior work with local governments is equally desirable, so that the consultant may be expected to understand the governmental context in which you are working.

Communication. Many archeologists, like other scientists and academics, have difficulty communicating effectively with the general public. Particularly if your consultant will be expected to oversee non-professionals in the conduct of survey or excavations, participate in training or education programs, or provide oral reports to the City Council, planning board, or historical

commission, you should give special attention to the archeologist's communication skills. The prospective consultant should be able to provide you with examples of material that he or she has prepared for the general public, or otherwise demonstrate his or her effectiveness in written and oral communication.

On-time delivery. The archeologist's record of performance on other jobs should document a history of delivering products, such as reports, on-time. Particularly if the archeologist's report will be needed to comply with grant conditions, or to comply with the terms of an agreement under Section 106 before a project can proceed, it is obviously vital that the archeologist be able to deliver his or her product on-time, and that he or she understand the need to do so. If the archeologist's work in the past has been subject to review by the SHPO, the National Park Service, the Advisory Council, or other Federal or State agencies, his or her record should document not only on-time delivery of products, but on-time delivery of products that the review agencies have found acceptable.

Cost. Consulting archeologists, like other consultants, generally cost money. In some special circumstances you may be able to obtain service for free, but this is rare, and there is always the danger of "getting what you paid for." Generally speaking, you can expect the cost of an archeological consultant to be equal to what you would pay for a consulting engineer, architect, or other professional working an equivalent amount of time. Costs can be reduced, however, where volunteers are available to assist the archeologist, where cost-sharing arrangements can be developed, or where cooperative agreements can be worked out with local institutions or organizations. The SHPO should be able to help you evaluate what a given archeological project should cost.

What kinds of procurement processes should I use?

Remember, that you are procuring professional services, and it is usually impossible to put a hard-and-fast price tag on such services, and if you simply contract with the lowest bidder you are very likely to get low quality services.

The National Park Service recommends procuring archeological services on the basis of competitive proposals. This involves developing a scope of work for the project and inviting multiple prospective consultants to offer separate proposals and bids. Proposals should then be evaluated by a Technical Proposal Evaluation Panel (TPEP) made up of knowledgeable people (but not necessarily all archeologists). The TPEP ranks the proposals and reports to the contracting officer, who then opens the bids and negotiates, if possible, with the most qualified offerer with the best proposal to get the job done for the best price. If agreement cannot be reached with the highest ranking offerer, the contracting officer negotiates with the next highest ranking, and so on. In this sort of procurement, price is one consideration, but it is only one, and it is not the prime consideration; the prime consideration is obtaining a quality product, from the best possible consultant.

If you anticipate having the need for archeological assistance on a periodic or occasional basis and it is too complicated to seek competitive proposals on each project, it may be appropriate to seek competitive proposals for all archeological services needed for a given period of time -- perhaps a year, or several years. It must be expected that proposals and bids by individuals and organizations offering such open-ended services will be more general and open-ended themselves than would be proposals for the conduct of particular projects, but the same basic system can be used to evaluate them and winnow out the best offerers.

The SHPO, the Regional Office of the National Park Service, the Advisory Council, and other Federal agencies are sources of assistance in the development of strategies for procuring archeological services, and can often provide knowledgeable people to serve on TPEPs, sometimes for free, sometimes if salaries and travel costs are reimbursed.

For more information on choosing an archeological consultant, see:

Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation Professional Qualifications Standards

36 CFR Part 61 Procedures for State and Local Government Historic Preservation Programs, Appendix A

Directory of Professional Archeologists. Society of Professional Archeologists, c/o William Lovis, Michigan State University Museum, East Lansing, MI 48824-1045.

Guide to Departments of Anthropology. American Anthropological Association, 1703 New Hampshire Ave. NW, Washington DC 20009.

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