

Guide to Selecting Fundraising Counsel

Six steps to choosing fundraising counsel.



Before you begin...

The decision to engage outside counsel is an important step for your organization.

You are entering into what will be a long-term relationship with a partner to attain an important, likely crucial, goal. As competition for donors' dollars continues to increase, attitudes of givers change and tactics and methods for attaining fundraising goals evolve, the selection of counsel has a dramatic impact on your organization for several years to come.

At Alexander Haas, our team has been where you are - on the decision-side of the table. From our personal experience, and review of several guidebooks and authorities on the topic of selecting counsel, we created this playbook as a guide to your selection process.

Inside, you will find information on the 6 crucial steps to selecting counsel:

- Identifying Potential Counsel Partners
- Preliminary Screening
- The Request for Proposal Process
- Checking References
- Face to Face Meeting
- Final Selection and Notification

Feel free to reach out to us at any point and make sure to check out the resources on our website at fundraisingcounsel.com. There we provide even greater tips and techniques on successfully following each of the steps.

David King
President & CEO



Step #1:

Identify Prospective Consultants

Once the board and/or staff leadership affirms the desire to investigate fundraising consultants or consulting firms, you can ***identify a pool of candidates*** via several avenues.

- **Referrals:** Ask colleagues for recommendations.
- **Directories/Advertisements:** Several associations produce directories of service providers in the sector (CASE, AHP, AFP). You will also find listings and advertisements in their periodicals.
- **Web Search:** A Google search will take you to the websites of potential firms. Search terms like “Fundraising Counsel”, “Capital Campaign Counsel”, “Feasibility Study” are a great place to start.

Step #2:

Preliminary Screening

Basic Information: Most firms provide basic information on their **website** about services offered and clients served. Use the web for your preliminary research. This allows you to look for firms that have experience you believe is relevant to your organization, view samples of clients served and review the background of the staff. Be wary of any firm that does not share clients served or staff bios on their website. This is basic information that any reputable firm will make easily accessible.

Detailed Information: From your research, **narrow the field to three or four candidates you feel suit your needs and arrange a phone call with each.** This call allows the opportunity to ask clarifying questions and obtain more specific information. It also allows the firms to ask you questions about your organization and project in order to determine if they feel that they are a good fit.

Step #3:

Request for Proposals

Proposal Content: After the phone calls, **determine your finalists and request proposals** from each of the firms you wish to consider.

Allow the firms the flexibility to present their information in a way they feel best represents their services, but be as specific as you can about the scope of work and request that proposals clearly state the costs, fees, services, a preliminary schedule and the proposed consulting staff you would work with.

Step #4:

Check References

Calling References: Always check references; always check them carefully. For the most candid references, select reference organizations without influence from the firms you are considering.

How? Review the firm's list of clients and **identify organizations you would like to call**. Then ask the firm to provide you with contacts for those organizations.

You may find that the staff who worked with the firms has now moved on to a new job and you will be directed to contact them as a former employee or you may be directed to a board member. In some cases, the firm may not be able to provide a contact you can speak with at one of the organizations you request. If that is the case, be prepared to offer an alternative from their client list.

Step #5:

Face-to-Face Meeting

At this point, you can **narrow the list down to two or three firms** that you feel are the best fit and have the approach and expertise that you desire.

The next step is to **meet the prospective consultant(s)**, and specifically the consultant(s) you will be working with. This can be done in an informal meeting/discussion with you (and those from your staff or board you have engaged in the selection process) or it can take the form of a more structured, formal presentation to the selection group.

In either case, **suggest to the firms what information you would like covered**. It may not be a good use of your time to have them review, in detail, the written proposal and suggested process (especially if the selection group has read the proposal), but there may be specific areas of their proposal that you would like to see expanded on or clarified. There are likely other areas, outside of the proposal content that you would like to have addressed. Allow the flexibility for the firms to include information they think is important.

Before your face-to-face meetings **notify all invited firms which have been selected as finalists** and have received an invitation to meet/present. It is likely that the firms you are meeting with know each other well.

Understanding who else you are interviewing allows each firm to highlight its distinctive differences in terms or philosophy and approach, making the process easier for you to select the best firm for your institution.

Step #6:

Notifying Candidates

Notify Everyone: Notify all candidates of your decision. It is considered a courtesy to explain briefly the reasons for your choice to the consultants you did not select and provide constructive feedback if you have any. Firms will appreciate this feedback and your willingness share. It is very likely you may need to call on one of the "non-selected" firms in the future.

Step 1:

Firms to Consider Worksheet

Name: _____

Referred by: _____

Contact Person: _____

Phone #: _____

Email: _____

Website: _____

Notes:

Step 2:

Phone Interview Worksheet

Name: _____

Call Date/Time: _____

Contact Person: _____

Phone #: _____

Email: _____

Website: _____

Questions to Ask:

1. _____

Answer:

2. _____

Answer:

3. _____

Answer:

Notes from call:

Step 3:

Request Proposals

Key information to include when asking for proposal:

1. Explain the specific services or scope of work you are seeking.
2. Give the date you would like all proposals in hand.
3. In what format do you want to receive proposals (PDF file, hard copy, etc.) and how (email, snail mail, etc.)?
4. Advise firms who to contact if they have questions while preparing their proposal.
5. Include a timeline for the process (finalist selected, in person presentations, decision made, etc.).
6. Any specific information that you want to receive that might not be part of their normal proposal response?

Step 4:

Checking References

Once you've received and reviewed proposals, narrow the list to your finalist and check references. From the firms list of past clients, select 3 - 4 that YOU want to talk with and ask the firm to provide a contact who would be knowledgeable of the firm's work.

Firm: _____

Reference 1: _____

Contact: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Notes:

Step 5:

Face-to-Face Meeting Worksheet

Firm Name: _____

Contact Person: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Interview Date/Time/Location: _____

Firm Representatives Attending: _____

Our Representatives Attending: _____

Questions/Clarifications:

Notes:

Step 6:

Notify All Firms of the Decision

Firm NOT Selected: _____

Reason not selected:

Constructive feedback:

