

Cracking the consultancy code

A complicated security project, like implementing a security or access control system on a multi-building campus, requires professional expertise. The challenge, however, is determining which type of professional to consult. Some would advocate for a security consultant, while others would propose someone well-versed in building code. Still others would recommend an integrator who understands various electronic platforms for security systems. If your project is an electronic solution, then you also need someone with IT experience. On top of that, others might suggest consulting the manufacturer to get up to speed on products and technologies.

The truth is, you need many, if not all, of those perspectives.

You generally won't find one individual or company who possesses all the knowledge your project requires. Because technology, security hardware products and building codes change regularly—or have nuances to them—it's important that you approach a large security project from several angles. Whether you're representing a school, healthcare facility or commercial entity, if you utilize multiple resources you can achieve an effective security solution.

Today, it is increasingly important that businesses and institutions leverage consultants (security advisors, architects, integrators, manufacturers and others) to design and implement security improvements and renovations. As you garner the collective brainpower—the expertise and experience of each advisor—you'll be able to identify and develop the best solution for your facility today and into the future.

Successful consultant relationships help you:

- Extend or augment your staff capacity and skill sets
- Conduct a comprehensive evaluation of how to best incorporate ever-changing technologies and best practices
- Provide analytical horsepower to evaluate trade-offs, cost benefit and return on investment analyses
- Implement solutions quickly and cohesively
- Supplement training for ongoing management of security solutions



In order to experience these payoffs, you have to have successful business relationships. Let's look at three steps for effectively managing consultant relationships.

Step 1: Choose consultants well

To find the best group of consultants for your project, you'll need to do your homework and research. Start by referencing local and national listing sources that group consultants by area of expertise, such as IT, integrator, security, etc.

Consultants specialize by discipline as well as industry or sector, so you can find professionals for your specific project needs. To locate a consultant that fits your project, ask around your industry for similar business implementations and recommendations. You can also peruse published case studies to identify consultants.

Identify and evaluate several consultants, then contact the front-runners for references and capabilities. Remember, it's highly unlikely that a single resource will be able to cover all your needs. When you bring on a team, you achieve greater balance and collaboration. As you consider which consultants to bring on board, consider those that fit your firm's culture and have decision-making and communication styles that work well within a team environment.

As you build your consultancy team, consider manufacturers as a resource as well. They can help you compare the various products and technologies available in the market. Plus, they can provide extensive code knowledge—particularly important since codes vary by building type, industry and state. Best of all, some manufacturers offer services at no cost.

Step 2: Prepare for interviews

Before you even begin talking to prospective consultants, you should:

- Clearly outline the project scope
- Identify the deliverables you expect
- Prioritize the key elements
- Develop a preliminary timeline
- Estimate a budget range
- Create a list of internal stakeholders

This information should be shared during consultant interviews. If proposals come back without these components, then the consultant may not be a good fit for your organization. The last point is particularly important. Many consultants site a failure to include key stakeholders as the reason for project snags. For example, IT can be an overlooked stakeholder in electronic access control projects. Yet, they must be involved to discuss network bandwidth and capabilities, integration of credentials and more. If they aren't involved from the beginning, it could cause setbacks once the project is well underway.

As part of the interview process, consider using a request-for-proposals strategy. This gives you another layer of evaluation and provides a glimpse into a consultant's work approach. You should request the same information from each consultant so a valid assessment and comparison can be drawn. Consultants appreciate a framework for the desired response.

Step 3: Formalize the decision

Once you choose your team of consultants, formalize it by developing an official statement of work or contract. This protects the interests of your business or organization and ensures that both parties are clear on deliverables and expectations. The opposite is true as well. When a thoughtful process that clearly states goals, desired outcomes, timeline and budget is not employed, it is common for organizations to be dissatisfied with the result—or even run out of money before a solution is in place.

Allegion security advisors

If your organization has a security concern and is seeking outside resources to provide assistance, remember to consider manufacturers as part of your team. They offer another unique perspective—and their counsel and advice is provided at no cost to you. Allegion, for instance, offers security and safety assessments, specification and building standards assistance, training and more. Additionally, Allegion regularly partners with other consultants and stakeholders—architects, integrators, IT, one card providers, building owners, facility managers, etc.—to develop a comprehensive solution that best meets the needs of our mutual clients.

To contact an Allegion security advisor for assistance with your security assessment and planning efforts, call 866-516-1597 or contact us at <http://ityvc/allegioncontact>.

About Allegion

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