

Do your homework!

As any financial consultant will tell you, sound investing takes research, analysis, and verification. Similarly, healthcare accreditation is an investment in the future of a facility and in the well-being of patients. Organizations seeking initial or re-accreditation often hire healthcare consultants to help them prepare for an accreditation survey and maintain compliance throughout the accreditation cycle. Hiring the right consultant for your organization requires some due diligence. We've outlined a few questions to get you started with finding a good match.

What type of experience best matches with your practice model?

Does your facility have one service line or are you a multi-specialty practice? Depending upon your answer, you'll want to know a candidate's qualifications and professional experience within your specific practice setting.

In what areas are you looking for expertise—clinical or operational?

If the consultant you're considering has a clinical or operational background within a healthcare facility, you will want to know these details as well.

Are you pursuing Medicare certification?

If you are an ASC seeking Medicare certification, ask candidates about their familiarity with the different code sets. If they don't cite the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) codes currently in use by CMS or your accrediting organization, then you may want to look elsewhere or face having to hire a second consultant to address physical environment requirements.

How much consulting experience does the candidate have?

Ask the candidate to provide both their professional and academic credentials.

Can they offer any references for which they've previously provided consulting services relevant to your needs?

Feedback from your colleagues in other facilities is incredibly valuable in assessing fit with your style and organization. They can provide firsthand knowledge about how this individual works. Is the consultant accessible? Does he or she understand the type of services you offer and can they "speak the language" of your organization/specialty?

What should you expect from the process?

Understanding your own expectations is essential. What are your goals and how do you want to work with the consultant to accomplish these expectations? Will there be phone consultations, mock surveys, staff education, or training opportunities? Be clear on what you need from the process. Doing a self-assessment of your facility may help identify areas of concern that provide a basis for focused discussions with your consultant. Involve your team by jointly draft learning objectives and goals. Preliminary steps like these, completed before decisions are made, will guide the scope and approach to the consultative services.

Last but not least, what will it cost?

Is there a flat fee or an ala carte fee schedule? Are you buying a pre-defined number of hours or is that open-ended based on completion of the project? Facility decision-makers and gatekeepers will need this data before plans are finalized and contracts signed.

Finding a consultant that is right for your organization takes extra effort. However, engaging in this preliminary Q&A may spell the difference between a beneficial or a disappointing experience. Ultimately, the goal is accreditation and continuous quality compliance for your facility, so choose wisely by gathering the information necessary before hiring. You want to maximize the benefits of engaging a professional consultant by taking the time to make a thoughtful choice. Getting it right may result in this person becoming an ongoing resource for your clinical or administrative staff.