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Cheaping it out on engineering hire can be expensive decision

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The engineering firm on your building project will account for only a fraction of the overall cost — if you choose correctly.

But if you go cheap in selecting an engineering firm or are careless about choosing a firm for your building project, costs can escalate, said a spokesman for the National Society of Professional Engineers, based in Alexandria, Va.

Generally, fees from an engineering firm will account for about 6 percent to 10 percent of the total project, he said. But if you select a firm that doesn't meet your needs, it can cost your company exponentially more in delays, repairs and liability costs.

The first and most important step in selecting the right engineering firm is to know what your project requires and what types of engineering services you will need.

There are many kinds of engineers to help you fulfill your needs. The type of firm you seek out will depend on your needs. Many firms will have all the different kinds of engineers you need on staff; others will subcontract the work out.

You should make sure the firm you hire has a high level of expertise and experience

with your type of project and that it has enough employees to handle your project or that if it does subcontract some work out, it has had experience and success doing so, he said.

The best way to make sure you hire a qualified firm is to put out a request for qualifications, asking competing engineering firms to show why they are qualified to work on your project. Then you evaluate and rank the firms. Finally, bring in the top-ranked firms for interviews, and ask in-depth questions about how they've handled similar projects in the past.

You should ask each firm to show proof of the certifications of the engineers they would employ on your project.

Also ask to see proof that the firm has professional liability insurance coverage and follows the rules of a professional code of conduct, whether set by itself or an outside organization.

Once you've decided on the top firm or firms, you should negotiate the price. You should make sure you're not being overcharged, but unless you're working on a low-bid contract, you should be careful not to just select the lowest-cost firm out of hand, he said.

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