

How Do I Hire a Landscape Contractor?

- There are three basic steps:
1. Creating a Scope of Work
 2. Capital Improvement Plan
 3. Company Qualifications

1. Creating a Scope of Work

Property management people often ask for bids from contractors with little or no idea as to what they want done. Be prepared, do your homework and create a scope of work specific to the property in question. If you're not qualified to create a thorough scope of work, hire a consultant.

- Create or obtain a map of the complex that is clear and large enough to read. Detail the exact areas of the property that are to be serviced.
- Clearly spell out what duties are to be performed in what areas. Some examples of these duties are as follows.
 - a) Determine how often the grass will be mowed and whether it will be overseeded in October.
 - b) Determine how often the shrubs and hedges need pruning.
 - c) Determine if and when trees will be pruned. Trees along sidewalks or sight corners may need more attention. Perimeter trees will only need annual pruning.
- Specify if the Contractor will be using on-site trash dumpsters or be required to haul away debris.
- It is important to be specific about how extra work such as storm damage, vandalism or accidents will be handled. Will there be additional billing charges?
- Communicate to the Contractor the Homeowners Association's rules, which may include that the Contractor and employees wear uniforms and name badges, check in with the on-site manager, and possible special operating times of noisy equipment.
- Create a water budget. When and how long will irrigation systems be operated. Is it within accepted water conservation guidelines?
- Know what the residents are expecting their community to look like. Would they like the shrubs to be maintained in a formal or informal manner. Informal landscapes are less costly to maintain, promote better plant health and create a more relaxed atmosphere for residents.

An on-site pre-bid meeting is an ideal way to distribute your Scope of Work to all the contractors interested in bidding on your property. This is a good time to answer any questions that may arise.

2. Capital Improvement Plan

Consideration for Capital Improvements is often overlooked in landscaping. Plants, irrigation systems, walls, picnic areas, recreation areas and patios need to be factored in for renovations and upgrades. Associations make plans or provisions to paint the units, resurface the drives and parking lots, but are totally unprepared when the 10 or 15 year old sprinkler system starts failing. It may be important that the company you hire have a design staff and construction crew to assist you in these upgrades or possible remodels.

3. Company Qualifications

The company must be licensed, bonded and insured to work in the State of Arizona. Ask for proof. They must hold a current Contractors' License, not just a business license.

It is a good idea to ask for a company profile. This tells how long the company has been in business, how many employees they have and the structure of the company. Ask for and call references. Call the Registrar of Contractors to find out if the Contractor has complaints filed against them.

It is important that a member of the on-site staff have an industry certification such as ACLP (Arizona Certified Landscape Professional) or ISA.(International Society of Arboriculture).

The more information you have up front, the more comfortable you will feel working with the Contractor. Be prepared, and everything should work out fine.

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