



First Choice of the Fortune 1000 for L&D Consultants

MANAGING YOUR CONSULTING FIRM



Consulting firms are a critical part of many projects, offering specialized skills and services without the long-term commitments associated with salaried employees. But in order to reap the full benefits of a consulting firm, you will need to effectively manage them over the course of your project, from initial selection all the way through post-project debriefing. With the right combination of vendor management techniques, you can leverage a consulting firm's strengths and build a strategic, long-term partnership.

Make the right choice.

It is always easier to manage a good consulting firm. To do this, you'll want to first do your homework to develop a list of possible firms. Then, once you have narrowed your list down to a few possible vendors, provide a non-disclosure agreement to each firm you interview. Beyond the interview, you'll want to check references, look at other projects they have worked on, and, if possible, check with colleagues to find out what their experiences have been with the prospective consulting firm.

Establish clear expectations up front.

Doing the upfront work required to clearly define your expectations is an absolutely critical component in effectively managing consulting firms. The more detailed the information you provide up front, the better able a consulting firm will be to deliver the appropriate solution.

Make sure you clearly communicate your requirements to the consulting firm, including:

- Skill sets (specific competencies)
- Education (degree level and area)
- Technologies (specific tools to be used)
- Years of experience (novice, intermediate or advanced)
- Geography (onsite or virtual)

You will also want to have a clear vision of what you need, then communicate those expectations to the consulting firm in the form of a project plan that includes:

- Project duration
- Budget
- Statement of work
- Criteria for success

Be clear about what you need. The more explicit you make your needs, the easier it will be for the consulting firm to meet those needs.

Hold a kick-off meeting.

At the start of the project, it is extremely important to hold a kick-off meeting to:

- Clearly communicate the goals of the project
- Establish roles and responsibilities
- Review key project milestones
- Define review cycles
- Identify project resources and stakeholders
- Introduce project team members to each other and provide contact information
- Establish open communications between team members

Get regular status reports.

Status reports allow you to monitor the project closely and address obstacles and risks before they threaten the success of the project. Get status reports on a regular basis, and make sure they provide the following general information:

- Current status
- Accomplishments
- Plans for the next reporting period
- Obstacles to the project's success, including issues, concerns and risks
- Requests for assistance

Stay in touch.

Expect your consulting firm to stay in touch with you over the duration of the project. Look for them to proactively check in with you—you shouldn't have to hunt them down. Establish mutually agreed upon checkpoints at the beginning of the project to monitor performance and progress and hold the consulting firm to that agreement.

Resolve issues as they come up.

Your consulting firm should have a standardized protocol for addressing any issues you or the consultant might have. Always communicate your issue promptly and expect the consulting firm to respond professionally with a minimum of emotion. Once the consulting firm has been apprised of the situation, the firm should do due diligence by researching the issue and coming back to you with their findings, as well as a suggested solution that makes a repeat of the issue less likely.

Debrief at the end of the project.

Once the project has been completed, meet with the consulting firm to discuss what went well, as well as provide suggestions for making the process run more smoothly the next time around.

Build a lasting relationship.

Vendor relationships are developed over time and based on mutual trust and respect. Once you find a consulting firm that provides superior service—and one that you are comfortable working with—you will want to nurture that relationship for future projects. After all, it is much easier to work with a “tried-and-true” vendor than take the time and risk to locate a new consulting firm.