

MANAGING SMALL REPAIR PROJECTS

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A well-defined scope of work and up-front research to identify qualified contractors is critical to success.

The sanctuary ceiling is rumbling, and you think its due to a faulty roof how do you begin to correct the problem? Often a Building Committee will try to get repair work done by asking several contractors to visit the site and submit proposals. Typically, the Committee discovers that each firm has a different solution -- and a different price. One contractor may say the roof needs to be replaced, while another may say that the masonry needs repointing. Then the Committee is stymied by sorting out what treatment, if any, is the right one and how to compare prices.

Preservation architect Michael Devonshire reports that he is frequently called by Building Committees to help guide them out of this predicament. The key to avoiding this situation is to first define the cause of the problem and precisely outline its repair before asking for bids. Says Devonshire: "Don't let the contractor drive the project.

When the institution itself lacks the expertise to define the problem specifically and write recommendations for its repair (called the "scope of work"), the best way to get on the right track is to retain an independent preservation architect, building-materials conservator, or a construction manager, depending on the type of work involved. Their fees can range from \$100 for a brief consultation to a few thousand dollars for long-term assistance. These knowledgeable building professionals can help to establish priorities and budgets, determine the correct treatment for the building problem, create outline specifications that describe the materials and techniques to be used to repair the problem, produce sketches to show bidders, and assist with project administration, such as walk-through, bid analyses, contract negotiation, approval of work, and mediation of problems. Good long-term relationships with building professionals can be very handy when emergencies arise.

If you have a number of small, urgent projects as well as long-term restoration needs, a report such as a conditions survey or master plan can establish priorities. These planning documents can provide an objective assessment of the conditions of each building component while making recommendations for repair. Surveys and preservation plans by architects and conservators can cost from \$2,500 to \$15,000 depending on the complexity of the structure and geographical region. Limited free advice on setting priorities and obtaining professional assistance may be available from preservation organizations (see Resources.)

Once you have a clear, written scope of work that includes a description of the problem and the All repair solution, send it to a number of contractors. Search out qualified, experienced contractors who have recently performed comparable work on historic properties. Get referrals from the Landmarks Conservancy, local preservation groups, your congregation and other institutions in the community that have undertaken similar work. Try to get atleast three qualified firms to bid on the same scope of work. Check references thoroughly by contacting former clients and inspecting completed projects.

Evaluate qualified bidders their level of experience, contract price and chemistry with the Committee. Choose a contractor who communicates in a manner that you can understand. The contractor should be able to clearly state how he or she would handle specific conditions or problems, since many disputes and legal problems are a result of poor communication.

If one contractor seems best for the job, but the price is too high, the Committee may request that the firm reconsider the bid. If the price s from all qualified bidders are too high, you will need to reduce the scope of work or break it down into affordable prioritized components that can be implemented over time.

Has your institution's legal counsel review contracts before signing anything: make sure it includes commitment and confirmation of the starting and completion dates. In addition, the contractor should provide proof of licensing and workmen's compensation and liability insurance coverage before starting the job.

Once the project is underway, a Building Committee member or consulting professional should frequently inspect the work. It is often easier and less costly to correct unacceptable work before the project has gone too far. This will help to maintain good relations between the Building Committee, contractor, and congregation.