

Traits of a Good Consultant

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Because of the immense variation in the consulting role and lack of licensing or other widely accepted standards of qualification, specifying precise, objective standards of competence is difficult. Although no two consultants work in exactly the same way, all capable professionals will demonstrate three essential qualities.

SKILL > Most consultants develop specialties — such as meeting facilitation and planning, assessment and evaluation, or board development and staff training. They keep up with developments in the field by studying the new literature, staying in touch with colleagues, and reexamining their own theories, biases, and experience. Their professional credibility is based on their consistent ability to perform at an exceptionally high level in the areas they have embraced as their own.

SENSITIVITY > Consulting is very often group work, including families. Some consultants relish the complexity of family behavior. They anticipate the problems that inevitably crop up during any kind of collective endeavor. And they know how to harness the energy of the family, without turning the process into a therapy session or allowing it to disintegrate.

EXPERIENCE > Good consultants have track records. They won't be using your project as a highly paid internship to learn the fundamentals of grantmaker management. Your foundation's goals and problems will neither surprise nor confound the seasoned consultant.