



The Equitable Hiring Toolkit

Introduction:

Capital projects are shaped not only by design and funding decisions, but also by who is hired to support the work. Most organizations cannot do this work alone; capital projects often rely on consultants, contractors, and technical experts throughout the process. These partnerships directly shape project direction, decision-making, and outcomes. One of the most important and often overlooked parts of the process is hiring the right people to support the work.

Equitable hiring doesn't just aim for fairness, this practice ensures those most impacted lead, shape, and benefit from the project meant to serve their community. It prioritizes lived experience, cultural competency, and community accountability as core components. This approach seeks to address historical imbalances in the capital development field, where power and authority has concentrated on individuals disconnected from the community in place.

This toolkit supports community-based organizations in hiring consultants for equity, transparency, and community accountability. It is designed for organizations navigating real estate, infrastructure, or capital development projects that are in early design stages (5 - 30%), when building the right team has the greatest impact. In it, you'll find **practical strategies for hiring consultants and vendors in ways that advance equity, transparency, and long-term community power.**

The logo for Greenlining The Block, featuring a green square with white text and a stylized 'E' shape made of three horizontal bars.

GREENLINING
THE
BLOCK



Why Equitable Hiring Matters in Capital Projects

Equitable hiring ensures that:

- Projects reflect community needs, culture, and lived experience
- Communities directly shape design and development decisions
- Technical decisions are grounded in cultural competence, accountability, and transparency
- Projects move forward with trust, alignment, and momentum

We have found that working with mission aligned development firms that center community-led processes and work with you throughout the process, result in better project outcomes with fewer delays. In comparison, traditional developers often follow a top down approach that may value experience over collaboration. While traditional development firms can still do strong work on community-led projects, their approaches can often clash on collaboration, decision-making, and whose priorities are centered. Choose partners who align with your values and project priorities.

Be wary of:

- Firms that prioritize “expertise” over lived experience without justification
- Consultants who treat community input as a checkbox rather than a core value
- Developers who are hesitant to engage in community processes around decision-making and feedback
- Development teams that prioritize technical expertise over collaboration and community impact

When hiring consultants, prioritize:

- Mission-aligned and values driven partners
- Experience working on community-led or CBO-driven projects
- Local firms or firms with experience working with similar communities
- Vendors with lived experience (women led, POC)
- Trusted referrals from partners



Step-by-Step Hiring Process

1. Define what you need

Clearly define what the role requires based on your project stage, organizational capacity, and community priorities

- Identify the current project stage (predevelopment, development, construction, etc.)
- Assess technical gaps on your team (e.g. architect, project manager, community engagement consultant, fundraising consultant, cost estimator, development advisor)
- Determine which responsibilities require lived experience vs. technical expertise
- Determine who should hold decision-making power (e.g., community advisory board, CBO leadership)

Equity In Practice:

Prioritize firms with experience beyond purely technical know-how to ensure work is grounded in real world impact and collaboration. E.g. community organizing, advocacy, cultural competency, community engagement, and facilitation.

For example, if hiring a community engagement consultant, prioritize someone with direct ties to the neighborhood—like a trusted local organizer or resident leader—over a candidate with a degree in urban planning but limited experience working in or with similar communities.



2. Check your budget

Set a realistic, transparent budget that reflects the specific scope you need

- Set fair compensation that values lived experience in addition professional or academic experience
- Account for the time and costs of meaningful engagement (e.g. stipends for community reviewers)
- Right-size the role
 - » Align the scope with the role's capacity — avoid overloading it with responsibilities that dilute impact or stretch funding too thin across multiple scope areas
 - » Include community-led tasks (e.g., co-creating deliverables with residents) as core responsibilities, not add-ons

Equity In Practice:

Budget for engagement with community and compensating community participation. Treat their time as essential to the project, not an afterthought.

For example, pay residents who review applications or participate in interviews.



3. Write a values-aligned request for qualifications (RFQ)

Draft an RFQ that explicitly names equity, lived experience, and cultural competency as priorities

- Share a clear project vision:
 - » What is the community's role in shaping this project?
- State explicit commitments to equity (e.g. "This project will center the voices of local small businesses")
- Request demographic information (e.g. women-owned, POC-led, local or small businesses).
 - » Note: Any disclosure of this information should be voluntary and should not be used for evaluation, selection, or contracting decisions. For additional guidance, we recommend consulting your program officer and reviewing relevant laws to better understand what is permissible in your jurisdiction.
- Include success metrics beyond technical outputs (e.g. Number of residents engaged in decision-making)

Note: Projects that receive federal, state, or local funding must comply with applicable procurement laws and regulations. This may include requirements related to competitive bidding, minimum number of bids, public notice, and documentation. Be sure to review all funding requirements before initiating your procurement process.

Equity In Practice:

In your RFQ, avoid jargon and explicitly call out what you value, not just what you need.

This sets the tone early and attracts applicants who align with your values, not just your technical requirements.

For example, "We prioritize mission-driven partners with community-led experience. We strongly encourage proposals from women- or people of color- owned firms. Strong candidates will show collaborative, adaptive work and provide trusted referrals from partners who can vouch for their impact."



4. Share widely

Cast a wide net by using community-rooted outreach, just as you would for resident engagement

- Share your hiring request through:
 - » Community networks (local nonprofits, faith groups, tenant associations)
 - » Affinity groups (e.g., National Association of Minority Contractors, Women in Construction)
 - » Social media (tag relevant community orgs)
 - » Worker cooperatives and community land trusts (for shared governance models)
- For added engagement, consider hosting a design competition or showcase where community members vote on who to hire

Equity In Practice:

Meet candidates/vendors where they are, prioritize networks where underrepresented professionals gather, not just traditional job boards.

For example, partner with cultural organizations, local business alliances, or minority professional programs to ensure your posting reaches diverse talent.



5. Screen for both lived experience and technical skill

Look for balanced candidates who deeply connect with the community and have the technical expertise necessary to deliver complex projects

- Assess community-led experience:
 - » Have they worked in or led initiatives where residents shaped outcomes?
 - » Can they provide examples of collaborative decision-making with community members?
- Verify community ties:
 - » Do they live, work, or have roots in this community or similar neighborhoods?
 - » Do they understand the cultural, historical, or political context of the area?

Equity In Practice:

Use a hiring rubric to score candidates/vendors blindly, ensuring lived experience carries equal weight to technical skills.

For example, if two candidates have similar technical qualifications, prioritize the one with deeper community roots even if their resume lacks traditional credentials.



6. Interview with intention

Structure interviews to assess how candidates/vendors collaborate, adapt, and handle conflict

- Consider asking these questions:
 - » How have you navigated disagreement in a project where community needs conflicted with technical requirements?
 - » Can you share an example of a project where you designed for a community you weren't a part of? What did you learn?
 - » How do you ensure community feedback shapes the final deliverables?
- Offer multiple interview formats if possible to accommodate different learning styles (e.g. written responses, verbal discussions, or visual presentations)
- Mitigate bias in interviews
 - » Use structured interview questions for all candidates/vendors
 - » Train interviewers on recognizing and countering implicit bias
 - » Consider blind review processes (e.g. remove names or identifying details from applications)

Equity In Practice:

Include community leaders in the interview process to ensure they have a direct say in hiring. This ensures the candidate/vendor aligns with community values — not just your team's preferences.

For example, convene a community review panel to score candidates/vendors alongside staff, giving residents equal weight in the final decision.



7. Onboard them as a partner and vendor

Set clear expectations and an onboarding process that centers collaboration with you and the community

- Co-develop a detailed onboarding plan with milestones (e.g. 30/60/90 plan)
- Introduce them to community partners (e.g. host an open house or design party)
- Clarify decision-making authority – what they own vs. what they advise on
- Provide cultural competency training to align with community values

Equity In Practice:

Pair them with a community liaison and build in regular check-ins with residents to evaluate their impact.

For example, schedule monthly feedback sessions where community members can share their experience working with the consultant.

