

Guidelines for
Finding, Selecting, and Working with your Designer
Tucson HOA Landscape Transformation Program

City of Tucson Water and University of Arizona/Pima County Cooperative Extension/Smartscape program have developed the Tucson HOA Landscape Transformation Program with the objective of *replacing high water-use plants and turf with desert-adapted and native low water-use plants.*

At this point the HOA has completed the Request for Proposal (RFP) process and in doing so has internally clarified their preferred approach for the design process and has also determined the desired project limits and potential phasing options.

These guidelines will assist the HOA in selecting your Designer and then collaborating with them as they develop the final design product.

This is not a passive activity for the HOA and their designated champion. *Communication at every step on the way* is critical to obtaining the desired end product with no surprises.

Finding the Designer.

The next step after finalizing the RFP is to send it out for responses. If you already have a preferred Designer, send it to them. If not and you're wondering, what do I do next? Follow this process.

Develop a shortlist. Put together a list of three or four designers that you think will be responsive to your project needs and send the RFP to them.

The best source for candidates is personal references. These can be from homeowners, referrals from other HOAs, and your landscape maintenance contractor. Check websites from professional organizations like the AZ Board of Technical Registration (for Registered Landscape Architects), AZASLA (Arizona Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects), or APLD (AZ professional landscape designers) for non-licensed but qualified designers.

Preliminary contact/interviews. Call the Designer candidates and ask if they are interested in your project. Ask if they have relevant experience. If you're comfortable with their responses, send them an RFP.

Send the RFP's. Send the RFP's to your shortlisted firms and then follow up with them to confirm if they received it, if they intend to respond, and if they have any questions.

Your RFP should have a firm deadline for response. As this deadline approaches, call and confirm that they are going to respond on time.



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If a Designer requests more time, compare the impact of the delay against the possibility of the Designer declining to respond. This is not necessarily a deal killer, but it can be a factor when the HOA makes their decision.

Selecting and Contracting.

Communication throughout this step is vital. This is an active process for the HOA.

Selecting. In evaluating the responses, verify adherence to the Scope of work or understand any deviations. It is okay to ask for clarifications and to ask for revisions if needed to match your visions.

Understand that low cost is not necessarily the best option, especially when dealing with professional services. Balance cost with relevant experience, references, licenses, certifications, other qualifications, and the value of the relationship.

Determine which of the respondents is most responsive to your vision and that you will be most comfortable working with and initiate the contracting process with them.

Contracting. Clearly identify the point person for the HOA for this process. And remember that this is your project and you can tailor it to your exact needs and expectations.

Contract form. This can originate from the Designer, the HOA, or the management company depending on the HOA's contracting procedures. Make sure the Designer and HOA are in agreement on the following items before executing the final contract.

Scope of work. Understand exactly what is being presented by the Designer and any deviations or exceptions that they are taking from the RFP scope. Clarify any additional tasks that may be needed that are outside of the proposer's scope.

Deliverables. Understand what the Designer will be providing and when. Specify progress reviews if desired. Clarify whether work products will be paper or digital (and in what format). Clarify who pays printing costs, if any.

Existing conditions. Clarify who is providing the existing conditions documents. If this is wholly or partially an HOA responsibility, refer to the *"Guidelines for Obtaining Existing Conditions Documents"* that is included in the program documents.

Meetings. What progress meetings or community/board presentations are included in the scope. These can be either regular calendar-based, or milestone-based depending on the complexity of the project.

Costs. Clarify payment expectations, how much and when, to the Designer. This may or may not align with the schedule for Tucson Water grant payments.



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Schedule. What are desired start and end dates and what are milestone delivery dates.

Collaboration during the design process.

Once the contract is signed, the Designer can go to work. Communication during the design phase is the key to avoiding surprises.

Meetings. The Designer cannot operate in a vacuum. Adhere to the meeting intervals specified in the contract. Be aware of the Designer's progress without getting in their way or being a nuisance.

Comply with the contract. Provide the information and/or documentation required by the contract. Pay the Designer promptly per the contract.

Be responsive. Promptly address Designer questions or concerns.

Change orders. Understand that changes can happen and that there may be a cost associated with them. Changed field conditions due to incomplete or dated information may trigger a design modification. Depending on where the Designer is in their design process, rework may be required, potentially resulting in cost or schedule changes. Rework driven by HOA initiated changes may also result in a change order.

Review and understand the final product. Make sure you understand what is being proposed, how it can be implemented, and the associated cost to do so. If you have been aware throughout the process, there should be no surprises at this point.

Project close-out.

When you are satisfied with the design, close out the contract.

Estimated cost to construct. Get this cost from the designer, including any phasing specified in the contract.

Anticipated water budget. What is the calculated/estimated irrigation water savings over time.

Designer role during construction. What role, if any, will the Designer have during the construction process and how will that be compensated .



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