

SELECTING DIVERSITY CONSULTANTS AND TRAINERS

Each provider has a unique mixture of motivations. Learning why potential vendors are in the intercultural field is a useful first step in determining which of them are most likely to be in harmony with your organizations' values and aims. At this level, the key issue of "good chemistry" is often resolved. Having compatible motivations is a necessary, but not sufficient, credential for a particular vendor to be your best choice. Compatibility must be combined with appropriate expertise, skills, and organizational capability in order for a provider to meet your needs.

You should satisfy yourself that they are not misrepresenting their experience or qualifications. It also pays to be skeptical of vendors that seem to promise too much. A reputable provider will readily admit to having realistic limitations and constraints. Likewise, be wary of salespeople who focus mostly on their products and services and who show little or not interest in your needs and concerns.

In making your selection you will want to assess both the organization and the proposed trainers. Following are some questions, which will be useful to consider.

The Company

The Organization

- Focus: Are intercultural services the vendor's core business? Does the vendor provide its own services directly, or does it use subcontractors? Who is accountable for client satisfaction?
- Expertise: Does the provider have the appropriate knowledge base and program design and delivery skills? Is its professional staff well qualified?
- Scope: Does the provider's expertise extend to all of the countries and cultures in which your company is interested?
- Responsiveness: Are your requests for information, assistance, and services responded to promptly?
- Flexibility: Does the provider have a reputation for reacting quickly and positively to client requests for changes in program content, dates, or location?
- Accessibility: Is it able to deliver services in various venues and at international locations?
- Versatility: Are the supplier's consultants and trainers capable of handling a variety of assignments?
- Organizational depth: Does the vendor have a sufficient number of staff to meet the demand for its services? Are their employees or contractors hired on an ad hoc basis?
- Professionalism: Does the organization function in a professional and business-like manner?
- Efficiency: Do its clients say that program booking, billing for services, reporting, and business communications are handled efficiently?

Materials

- Appearance: Are the materials attractive and professional looking? Making a good first impression reflects a commitment to quality, organizational pride, and business savvy.
- Writing quality: Is the text readable, concise, and free from grammatical and spelling errors?
- Thoroughness: Do the materials include descriptions of services, organizational structure, capabilities, philosophy, and mission? Do they reveal how long the provider has been in business? Do they contain client lists and profiles of past projects?
- Focus: Are the purposes of different kinds of programs well defined? Are services such as training, consulting, and counseling clearly distinguished from each other?
- Detail: Are the descriptions of services and programs detailed enough to determine, for example, if they are generic or custom tailored.
- Tone: Is the overall tone business-like, academic, or informal and folksy?
- Credibility: Are the claims made in the materials believable? Are any testimonials included verifiable?
- Added value: Are useful items such as article reprints, survey reports, or samples of program materials enclosed?

- Rationale: Do the materials provide solid rationale regarding the need for intercultural services?

Professional Standing

- Involvement: Have they been involved in the intercultural professional society and the international human resource organizations for a significant amount of time (5 years or more)?
- Intellectual contributions: Have they contributed to the intercultural field by writing articles or books and making presentations at professional conferences? Have they done research?
- Academic credentials: Have they studied intercultural topics in formal academic settings? Do they teach courses? Are academic credentials essential in order to meet your needs?
- Continued learning: Have they attended intercultural programs, seminars, and workshops?
- Public recognition: Are they mentioned or quoted in human resources and business publications? Have they received awards for their work?
- Service record: How long have they been in business? How much experience do they have providing which kinds of services?
- Client satisfaction: Do they have a respectable client list? Are their clients willing to give them unequivocally positive references?
- Reputation: Are they known in the field? Do they have a reputation for integrity and quality?

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The Trainers

Content and Knowledge

- Can s/he identify and discuss key cross-cultural concepts?
- Do they have the country-specific, region, or industry-specific information to meet your needs? If not, do they have resources to obtain the information?
- Do they understand the developmental states people experience in becoming culturally competent?
- Do they understand the process of cultural adaptation? Have they experienced it?
- Do they understand the effect training may have on trainees?
- Can they discuss adult learning styles and how they affect training design, instructional methods, techniques, and aids?
- Do they understand your outcome expectations?
- Can they discuss alternative training program evaluation methods?

Skills—these are questions you may want to ask references:

- Do they have experience conducting organizational needs assessments?
- Are they able to customize program design and content to your needs?
- Have they demonstrated the ability to create supportive learning environments?
- Can they keep their program on time and a good pace for participants?
- Do they have skills in presentation, facilitation, summarization, and feedback?
- Do they have the ability to stimulate trainees into participating actively?
- Can they accommodate different learning styles and cultural backgrounds?
- Do they effectively use resources: people, training materials, and teaching aids?
- Can they take advantage of unanticipated learning opportunities?
- Do they have the ability to provide practical illustrations and examples?
- Can they effectively model cross-cultural skills?
- Do they have the ability to maintain focus on program objectives?

Personal Attributes

- Do they demonstrate an openness to, interest in, and enjoyment of cross-cultural experiences and people?
- Are they sensitive to cultural differences, including showing respect and value for them?
- Do they have cultural self awareness?
- Do they show intellectual and behavioral flexibility?
- Do they have charisma as a trainer and the ability to inspire learning—without promoting dependence on the trainer?
- Can they demonstrate empathy, energy and enthusiasm in the classroom?
- Do they show interpersonal warmth and approachability?
- Do they demonstrate personal comfort with your corporate culture?
- Do they have a commitment to excellence?
- Do they show a sense of accountability for results of their programs?

Ethics

- Do they recognize and admit their own limitations as trainers, not extending themselves beyond their current capabilities?
- Can they discuss current cross-cultural ethical issues?
- Can they avoid promoting their own personal values in the classroom?
- Can they discuss the potential risks and stresses of intercultural training for both the trainer and the participant?
- Do they caution trainees not to extend themselves beyond the limitations of their new learning?
- Do they preserve the confidentiality of privileged client information?
- Do they decline assignments they consider ethically compromising?
- Do they continually learn and upgrade their own knowledge and skills? How?