

Interviewing Renovators

Getting the right contractor for your home renovation doesn't have to be difficult or complicated.

Once you have developed a list of potential candidates, whittle it down to a manageable number for personal interviews. It's best to meet face to face in your home, which also allows you to explain your renovation plans more easily.

The interview is your opportunity to get to know the renovator better and find out if the company would be suitable for your project. Below is a list of suggested topics and questions to help you to make informed decisions about who to hire.

■ ***About the company***

- How long have they been in business?
- How big is the company?
- What's the renovator's background?
- Do they have a business address?
- Do they belong to the local Home Builders Association? A local trade or business organization?

•

■ ***About past and current projects***

- What's the company's focus and expertise?
- What's the range of projects they take on, in terms of size, budget and type?
- How many projects do they work on at a time?
- What projects are they currently working on?
- Would you be able to visit one of their projects to see their work first-hand?
- Will they provide you with references to previous clients?

■ ***About the company's business practices***

- What services do they offer (e.g. energy assessment, design/build, assistance with product selections)
- Do they provide written estimates and a written contract?
- Do they have a business number (and a license where required)?
- Are they covered by workers compensation?
- Are they insured for at least \$1 million
- Do they offer a warranty on their work? What does it cover, and for how long (look for a minimum of one year)?

■ ***About the company's management approach***

- How do they price projects (e.g. firm cost or cost-plus [hard costs plus management fees])?

- Can you make changes to your project after the contract is signed?
- How do they manage the site day to day?
- Once the work is under way, how do they communicate with homeowners (e.g. daily log book, weekly meetings)?
- Will they keep the site tidy and clean?

■ ***About your project***

- What would they see as the next step in your project (e.g. design, energy audit, estimate)?
- Do they have any initial thoughts about your project, or suggestions?
- How long would they think the work would take?
- When might they be able to give you an estimate and start work?
- What is their sense of the budget needed for your plan? Or alternatively, will the budget you have allocated (note the amount to the renovator) be sufficient for your plans?

Once you have interviewed the renovators on your list, the next step is to ask for an estimate. You can ask every company to provide one if they all appeared suitable, or you can narrow it down to one or two, who seemed to stand out from the rest. Given that preparation of a detailed estimate involves time and expense for the contractors, there is little point in requesting an estimate from a contractor you have already decided against hiring.

You should also be aware that, for more complex projects, development of a detailed estimate may require preparation of detailed design and specifications. Many contractors will request a fee for doing this design work or a fee to prepare a detailed quotation. However, they may offer to waive the fee or credit it towards the contract if they are subsequently hired to do the work.

*This checklist has been prepared by the Canadian Renovators' Council
of the Canadian Home Builders' Association.*