

Hire locally: Great essay explains why. (Naples, Florida)

What is the true value of locally based consulting services?

CHRIS HAGAN, P.E. / Naples / Director of Collier County Services, Johnson Engineering Inc. 5:00 p.m., Saturday, April 18, 2009

Many local purchasing officials have adopted the philosophy that the cheapest possible price for professional design services (engineering, surveying, architecture, etc.) represents the best and highest possible value to the residents of a particular municipality. They have tended toward ranking the out-of-towners higher than the local consultants _based on qualifications,_ knowing at the end of the negotiation process their price will be lower. Many organizations in Collier County _ and the county itself _ have postured about attracting high-wage technical jobs to the county. A good start would be to hang on to those types of jobs that are already here.

Local consultants reside and work here. The offices they occupy pay local real-estate and tangible taxes. Their employees live locally. They, too, pay local real-estate taxes on their homes or apartments, have paid their share of impact fees on their homes, buy fuel for their cars here and pay local gas taxes, shop locally and pay local sales taxes, pay user fees for government-supplied services such as beach parking, parks, park programs, etc. It is impossible to calculate how much of a particular dollar paid for consulting services is returned to county coffers by the same people performing these services, but it is definitely a higher percentage than an out-of-town firm that contributes zero to the local economy and exports our tax dollars to parts unknown.

There are many other value-added efforts that local companies and their employees contribute that make this community a functional community that may be considered to be _priceless_ such as:

Employees are registered voters and sit on local juries.

They provide a volunteer base (YMCA, Little League, Jaycees, etc.).

They contribute to local charities.

They participate in local government (workshops, advisory boards, committees, technical input, etc.).

They_re daily users of public works projects.

They volunteer for disaster recovery.

They have local knowledge of our unique land conditions.

We do not believe that out-of-town consultants participate in the community at this or any level.

Please consider all of the above hidden values when selecting a consultant. Is a mega-engineering company with worldwide offices that invests \$400 a month, and an answering machine in the county, and ships all the work to an office in Orlando, Tampa, Miami, etc., really a local firm?

These purchasing practices will drive local professionals out of town.

Do you really want to lose all of the hidden values represented by having a strong local consultant base? During this economic downturn, many local firms have had significant layoffs equaling a significant percentage of the overall firm staffing. This trend must stop and the local government needs to understand its importance in this endeavor.

Please adopt a strong local preference policy regarding selection of consulting services. The law allows this, and other municipalities in the region are selecting based on this criteria. The talent is here. Let's hang on to it.

Hagan says representatives from these engineering firms also had input: Agnoli, Barber and Brundage, Hole Montes and Associates, Humiston and Moore, Johnson Engineering, RWA and Wilson/Miller.

His essay first appeared in the East Naples Civic Association newsletter's April edition.
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