
NEGOTIATING THE TERMS

Once the client has selected

Once the client has selected the designer, client and design firm are in a mutual love-fest. Neither wants to destroy that harmony with a nasty negotiation process. However, the negotiation of satisfactory terms is crucial to the success of the project and, ultimately, to the financial health of the design firm. Ideally, if the designer's (or the client's) proposal is fairly reasonable and the fee acceptable, there will be no confrontation. But if there are issues to be addressed, designers have an opportunity to use the negotiation as a forum to communicate the project process. An experienced client already knows that the project process is not a straight path, but the inexperienced client needs to be educated about potential risks in the process. Most owners expect designers to approach negotiations with the same level of professionalism and analysis that they will exhibit on their project. Like the presentation, the negotiation is another demonstration of how the design professional will work. The designer's goal in negotiations is mutual understanding and an equitable agreement. To get there, designers should prioritize issues and get help when they need it, from their attorney or their insurance carrier.

FORMALIZING THE AGREEMENT

Once signed and dated

Once signed and dated, the proposal may serve as the agreement, often augmented with additional terms. It may serve as the basis for a formal agreement, customized by the firm, by the client, or as offered by a professional organization. The American Institute of Architects' B-141 form can be used for interiors as well as architecture, and AIA B-171 is written specifically for interiors projects. Whatever the form, it formalizes the project terms and the relationship. It should be a celebratory occasion, launching a new collaboration or continuing an existing one. Design professionals are advised to take the time to acknowledge it with their clients, as a key step in building a solid platform for the creative process.

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