



## MUSEUM CONSULTANTS

BY STEVEN R. KELLER, CPP

Steve Keller, CPP, President of Steven R. Keller and Associates, Inc., a security consulting firm which works almost exclusively in the field of museum and cultural institution security, knows about problems with security consultants. As former Executive Director of the International Association of Professional Security Consultants, a professional association which serves both the consultant (as the primary professional association) and the consumer (as administrator of the Code of Conduct and Ethics for the industry), Keller has seen all possible complaints about consultants. The primary complaint involves consumers not getting what they expected or thought they had paid for from the consultant.

"If you want a report, you have to specify that you want a report," Keller noted. "Too many people hang out a shingle, call themselves a consultant, then lack the experience to deliver a suitable report. And too many clients don't bother to pin the consultant down as to what it is the consultant will provide to earn his/her fee." Keller noted that it is not always possible prior to an initial visit to know what the total project will entail or cost. But every consultant should be able to provide a basic yet extensive report after an initial visit. Too many consultants want to break the project down into smaller and smaller phases and bleed it for every possible cent.



Too few clients check references and compare consultants. Then, after the project is done, they find that the consultant has taken their money--all that is budgeted for the project--and they have nothing to show for it. In nearly every case, this can be avoided by calling colleagues to check on the consultant. Remember that many references have no point of comparison. Seek out larger institutions who have used several of the museum security consultants and ask for a comparison. Compare price, quality and amount of work provided, and don't under estimate the importance of looking at the personalities involved. Can you work with this consultant?

Another source of friction has been the consultant who offers to do a project for a substantially lower fee than other consultants. Always looking for a bargain and always short of money, museums jump at the opportunity. Then, they find out that future phases will be needed, whereas the higher priced consultant had intended to provide a detailed report for what ultimately would have been the real bargain. A request for

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proposal against which each consultant is asked to provide a proposal is the solution here. When consultants submit proposals, look to see what they DO NOT include. A good proposal will say as much about what is not included as what is.

Museums are not all alike, but they have many similarities. They are very different, however, from other types of institutions and businesses and require someone with special expertise in the field to serve as their security advisor. You wouldn't ask an interior decorator to do the curator's job so why ask a former cop to develop a security plan for your museum. Such sensitivities as aesthetics, historic fabric, academic freedom and the museum's ambiance must be understood, as does the unique operating procedures in the museum. Keller was once told by a consultant, who specialized in counterintelligence work for the government that he was qualified to do museum security "since the thought process was the same" between the two facets of security. Keller noted that this was true, but that the government was in a lot of trouble if he (Keller) was asked to do counterintelligence work because he lacks specialized knowledge in the field of counterintelligence. So how can the counterintelligence expert possibly call himself a museum expert? If one does not know how registration records are kept, he/she can't prevent someone from stealing by manipulating them. Yet many museums continue to hire consultants who lack sufficient knowledge and experience in the field

to do the work properly.

The use of electrical engineers and alarm vendors to design museum security and fire systems is a serious problem. Keller said that much of his work involves correcting the work done by engineers and especially alarm vendors. "Never let an alarm vendor design your alarm system," Keller cautions. One common problem is that the engineer, not understanding the need for flexibility in the gallery so the designer or curator can move walls or install large sculptures, provides an alarm system design so inflexible, that it limits the curator's creativity or jeopardizes the collection. Another problem is that vendors usually sell museums systems that are obsolete before they buy them.

Keller advises the following: Gather a list of security consultants by talking to as many colleagues as possible. This will be easy. There are only a handful of museum security consulting specialists in the United States. Don't always ask the museum director for a reference. Find out what the security director has to say. The security director lives with the consultant's work everyday. Develop a request for proposal outlining exactly what you want the consultant to do and ask for a quote against it. Make that RFP part of the contract so he/she must deliver. Automatically exclude any product-affiliated consultants from the bidding. Exclude electrical engineers unless they have a museum security specialist on their team.



Ask each consultant to give you a detailed list of his services. Remember that you should be looking for someone who offers full services to you. You may not need an alarm system upgrade today, but five years will pass quickly and you probably will need technical advice then. If your consultant has not shown a track record for technical security including preparation of bid documents and value surveys, you may want to look further for a firm with a broader range of expertise. Why change consultants later because yours is limited to one area.

Specialties within museum security that should be part of the consultant's skills either in-house or through regularly used associates (whose bio is included in the proposal) are: general security management and manpower surveys; architectural and engineering support for renovations and expansion, including hardware consulting; technical security surveys and alarm system analysis; electronic system design and specification; value surveys to determine if you are overpaying on service or guard contracts or are improperly deploying security resources; fire system design; fire and safety surveys; training evaluation and manual preparation (ask for samples of work done); policy manual preparation; internal security and pre-employment screening programming; assistance in obtaining grants for security projects; pre-theft and post-theft strategic planning; emergency preparedness and disaster planning; special exhibition and object transportation security; crowd control planning as it relates to

security; and visitor services operations. If your project involves an historic building, be absolutely certain that your consultant has experience in this regard AND has associates available to assist with matters involving modification of doors to receive modern locks, etc. If you have a library, it helps to have a library specialist on staff or as an associate. And the consultant should have knowledge in areas such as display case design, art hanging methods, etc.

Consumers of security consulting services should be aware of the tremendous growth in the area of security litigation. Company directors are being sued for failure to train guards, for acts and omissions of guards, and for failure to foresee security problems. The modern security consultant should be capable of performing a litigation avoidance survey and in advising your attorney on lighting and similar standards affecting security. Don't assume that your insurance will cover you for security litigation. You should establish a relationship with a security consultant before you need him, commission a survey with "foreseeability" as part of the scope, then be able to defend yourself later by saying that your expert in security advised you to maintain the level of security that you maintained when the problem occurred.

Keller noted that a committee is currently meeting to establish recommended practices in museum security, which will eventually become "standards" that all museums will have



to meet. If your consultant is to serve you well, he or she must be conversant in these practices and be active in industry committees. Your consultant should be recognized in the field of security due to actual successful work in a museum as a security administrator, or be a Certified Protection Professional with one of his three areas of certification testing in educational institution security. He should subscribe to the Code of Ethics of the American Society for Industrial Security and the International Association of Professional Security Consultants and should verify in writing that he does not accept referral fees or compensation from any security equipment or manpower supplier. He should be willing to provide you with an extensive list of references in similar projects. Your museum security consultant should be readily recognized as an established and reputable expert by his or her list of professional publications and papers, text books, and public appearances.

One test of the security consultant's value is his willingness to provide you with a not-to-exceed fee proposal for your project. While this is not always possible, it is possible for preliminary surveys and very often for other projects. To determine the true cost of your consultant, find out if follow-up service such as phone consultation is free or billed at an hourly rate. What expenses will you pay for the consultant such as first class air travel?

Ask your consultant to bill you AFTER the job is done. While it is logical that he/she should expect some fee and expenses in advance to keep cash flowing through his/her small business, the work should be backed up by a good old-fashioned guarantee. If you aren't satisfied, give the consultant one chance to satisfy you, then tear up the bill! Will he/she agree to this? If your work involves alarm system design and specification, find out what system the consultant specified at previous projects. Beware of a consultant who specifies the exact same system over and over again--regardless of whether that system is right for the museum or whether there is established local service in the area. This may signal a hidden product affiliation. A museum security consultant should do custom work for each client.

In security consulting you get what you pay for. Sooner or later, most museums pay a true museum security expert to do the job over that should have been done right in the first place. Often this happens after a theft or an incident that could have been avoided.