

Hiring Experts

Strata Managing Agent

There are many factors to consider when hiring a strata managing agent, such as:

Many schemes will opt to employ a strata manager. A strata manager can tell you about the legal and insurance requirements to running a strata scheme, and save the strata committee time by managing and maintaining the scheme and Strata meetings. However strata managers cannot provide legal advice. Strata managers also provide a clear point of contact for owners and residents, and can act as mediators if there are disputes between owners.

Price:

Assess your expectations of the role of the strata manager, and don't pay for more services than you need

Experience:

Check that the strata manager has the correct qualifications and experience to suit the size of your scheme, seek out recommendations and ask the manager for references from other schemes they manage

Communication:

Seek strata managers that have good communication skills, as it important to remain informed about their actions.

Building Manager

When hiring a building manager, consider:

Price:

Is the scheme large enough to warrant a building manager? Smaller schemes could instead hire a manager on a part-time basis rather than full-time. If you have a strata manager, consult them for advice on whether a building manager might be necessary.

Experience:

Check that the building manager has the correct qualifications and experience to suit the size of your scheme, seek out recommendations and ask the manager for references from other schemes they manage.

Communication:

Have a face-to-face interview with prospective building managers to gauge whether they are appropriate for the scheme and likely to enact the vision of the owners corporation, and to ascertain their communication skills.

Before a building manager is employed, they must disclose whether they are connected to the original owner of the strata scheme, and if they have any pecuniary interest in the scheme. To employ a building manager requires a [building manager agreement](#), which states their functions.

A building manager (or caretaker) assists with the day to day running of the building. An owners corporation might employ a building manager to:

- manage, maintain and repair the common property
- control the use of common property by tradespeople
- perform concierge and cleaning duties
- provide security services

Law Professionals

When hiring a lawyer to counsel or represent your scheme, consider:

“A lawyer can be a useful asset to any executive committee. Executive [strata] committees can get into any number of legal arguments with owners or subcontractors, developers or builders ... Having someone who knows the basics of litigation and legal tactics can be very helpful to assist with by-law interpretation and to point out the need for new or different by-laws”

[Owners Corporation Network](#)

Price:

Strata legislation can be extremely complex, and for this reason it is advisable to hire dedicated strata lawyers. However, specialised lawyers can be costly, and so the benefits of hiring a strata-specific legal professional should be weighed against the legal circumstances and budget of the scheme. If the appropriate lawyer can't be employed in the long-term, consider consulting them for initial advice.

Experience:

For larger issues and litigation, employing a law professional that is experienced with strata legislation and strata cases is advised. Seek out recommendations from other strata schemes that are or were in similar circumstances.

Builders and Building Specialists

Builders, contractors and various specialists, such as engineers, environmental auditors, plumbers and electricians can be employed for projects such as defect rectification or implementing sustainable retrofits. The number and nature of specialists or tradespeople that you need to employ varies depending on the project, and it is important to employ the person with the right experience to carry out the work.

Employing specialists can be a challenging task, as often owners and strata committee members will have very little knowledge of the area of specialisation and are vulnerable to paying more for unnecessary work or products. Therefore, make sure the experts you hire come recommended, or that have multiple references.

When hiring experts to assess or commence work in your scheme, consider:

Do you need a builder or tradesperson?

If you want your gutters replaced or your plumbing fixed, you need a tradesperson.

If you want to add another bedroom or build a new home, you need a builder to organise the right tradespeople to do the work.

From [NSW Fair Trading](#)

Price:

When employing specialists for larger projects, constantly assess the budget. Weigh up whether it is worth paying more for builders and experts with greater assurances and experience, and seeking their expertise sooner rather than later. For work, advice or projects that require an ongoing relationship, ask to pay in instalments or stages to prevent paying a large bill in one go, and agree on budget caps for each stage of the project.

The [Your Home](#) website suggest asking your builder, experts or building consultants the following questions where applicable to ascertain their experience:

- How long have you been in business?
- What experience do you have in this type of project?
- Have you done [projects] like these before?
- Are you willing to order materials from nominated, preferred suppliers?
- Which insurances do you carry and what warranty do you provide?
- What facilities will you require on the project (e.g. toilet and kitchen access, materials storage in garage or garden area)?
- How might you separate the site (and dust, noise, vibration) from the living areas?

Experience:

Speak to previous clients for the prospective experts if possible and ask to visit their current projects. You must check that the builder or tradespeople are adequately certified for any work over \$5,000, and all specialists (electrical, plumbing, draining etc) must be certified regardless of cost of works. Check [NSW Fair Trading's](#) licence register or the

Construction Assist Portal to ensure the person you are dealing with is appropriately licensed.

Another consideration when hiring tradespeople or specialists, is considering their insurance eligibility. If they are not eligible for insurance under the Home Building Compensation Scheme, then they cannot lawfully contract or do work that requires insurance (generally if work on a residential building totals more than \$20,000, it must be insured).

Sustainability Practices:

If you are implementing environmentally sustainable retrofits, or want to ensure renovations or defect rectification is undertaken in an environmentally sustainable manner, you might want to consider what materials the builders and contractors will be using, and how they get rid of waste from the building site.

The Your Home website suggests asking your builder, experts or building consultants the following questions, where applicable:

- Are you familiar with and enthusiastic about sustainable practices?
- Are your subcontractors environmentally aware?
- Are you familiar with certification protocols like GreenTag, GECA or FSC certification?
- How do you approach reuse, recycling and waste minimisation?
- What aspects of environmentally sound construction do you see as most important?
- How do you ensure that materials come from environmentally preferred sources?

Project Manager

A project manager can:

- help you get references and put a simple business case together
- put the scope of works together
- help with planning the works
- advise which quotes to accept from building professionals and tradespeople
- help you to determine which building professionals are most appropriate to hire
- help oversee the quality, costs and time management of the works

Be clear when hiring the project manager what functions and roles you expect them to undertake.

For large building projects, such as extensive defect rectification work or sustainability retrofits, the strata committee might decide to hire a project manager. Project managers can be hired externally such as an architect, or alternatively the building manager may take on the job for smaller projects. When considering a potential project manager, you should consider:

Price:

Is the project large enough to warrant a project manager? Smaller projects might only require amateur supervision. If you have a strata manager or building manager, consult them for

advice on whether a project manager might be necessary.

Experience:

Check that the project manager has the correct qualification, licences and experience to suit the size of your project, seek out recommendations and ask the manager for references from other similar projects they manage or have managed.

Communication:

Have a face-to-face interview with prospective project managers to gauge whether they are appropriate for the project and likely to enact the vision of the owners corporation, and to ascertain their communication skills. Project managers need to be effective communicators to manage tradespeople, residents, owners and building professionals. Ask about their preferred communication process, such as how much they expect to contact you and how much you are expected to contact them, and the process for variations to works. Check whether they live near the area, so they can easily be present in case of any issues relating to the project and that they do not have a large workload at present, in case it effects their ability to provide your project with the appropriate attention.

Finding an Expert

The following general tips are adapted from the [NSW Fair Trading website](#) on finding a builder or tradesperson, however the hints can be applied to hiring any expert:

- ask people for their personal recommendations (e.g. project manager if you have one)
- ask other people in the industry
- ask the relevant industry association for a list of names
- look for advertisements on television, radio, home buyer magazines or the local newspaper
- search the Yellow Pages or other relevant online directories within specific trade categories.
- contact past and current clients of the experts, and not simply based on the references the experts themselves provide

Additional Resources:

- [Your Home, Australian Government](#)
- [What Can You Expect From Your Strata Manager? Owners Corporation Network](#)
- [Selecting a Tradesperson or Builder, NSW Fair Trading](#)