

Managing Expectations of Foreign Clients

Excerpted and adapted from *The Architect's Handbook of Professional Practice*, 13th edition

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SUMMARY

Working overseas requires astute cultural awareness and a willingness to shelve the assumption that U.S. business culture reflects the norm in international business relationships. Managing the expectations of foreign business clients in key areas such as scope of work, compensation, leadership, and negotiation is an important skill for U.S. architects to understand and practice.

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The performance expectations of foreign clients can be very similar, or vastly different, from the expectations of American clients. Expectations can also vary widely from one country or culture to another. American architects working abroad should not assume that the business environment and culture in other countries will be similar to U.S. business culture. Although no rules of thumb would apply uniformly to clients around the globe, U.S. architects should be alert to the following issues:

- Expectations regarding the scope of work or level of completeness for each product and service can vary widely and, to avoid misunderstandings, should be explicitly documented in the client-architect agreement.
- The true purpose of a building project may be different from what it appears to the U.S. architect; study the business, social, and political culture sufficiently so that you are more apt to understand underlying motives in their native context.
- Compensation amounts and methods vary widely. Foreign clients may be unfamiliar with the scope and value of the architectural design services provided by U.S. architects. Consequently, they may be unwilling or unable to afford the level of service necessary for the success of the project.

- The expectation of “winning” is high in many cultures; for some foreign clients, the ends may justify the means.
- Negotiation tactics vary widely; a skillful tactic in one country may be a complete blunder in another.
- Foreign clients in many countries often expect “loss leaders.” It is not uncommon for architects or development-design-construction teams to be expected to provide thorough design solutions without compensation before a team is selected.
- Some foreign clients may expect the U.S. architect to secure financing or tenants for a project.
- Many foreign clients expect the architect to be a true generalist and to provide services that in the United States are considered specialized or unrelated to architectural services.

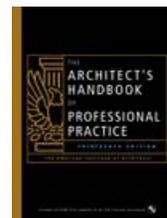
More Best Practices

The following AIA Best Practices provide additional information related to this topic:

- 06.04.01 Getting Paid for International Work
- 06.04.02 Managing International Teams
- 06.04.10 Working Overseas

For More Information on This Topic

See also “Practicing in a Global Market,” by Roger B. Williams, FAIA, JIA, and C. Richard Meyer, FAIA, *The Architect's Handbook of Professional Practice*, 13th edition, Chapter 6, page 100. The *Handbook* can be ordered from the AIA Bookstore by calling 800-242-3837 (option 4) or by sending e-mail to bookstore@aia.org.



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Keywords

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