



Ontario Association of  
**Landscape Architects**

# Engaging a Landscape Architect

Part Four:

## **OALA Guide to Design Competitions**

2019



## **Preamble**

The Ontario Association of Landscape Architects (OALA) Competition Guidelines are separated into key sections that provide both a broad contextual overview of the competition process and, where appropriate, some specific direction to sponsors, potential professional advisors, jury members, and individuals or firms participating in or considering entering a landscape architectural competition. It must be understood, however, that these Guidelines are not intended to supply exhaustive detail covering every possible situation — they are guidelines, not rigid stipulations.

## **Disclaimer**

These Guidelines are made available by the OALA for use by its members and other individuals or organizations considering sponsoring or organizing a landscape architectural design competition. They are intended for information purposes only and should not replace professional advice or consultation. The OALA assumes no responsibility for members participating in design competitions or for design competitions organized or sponsored by any other organization, including private companies, government bodies, or public-private partnerships. OALA members engaging in design competitions do so at their own risk. Organizations sponsoring a design competition are solely responsible for the competition.



The OALA is a component organization of the Canadian Society of Landscape Architects.

# Engaging a Landscape Architect

## Part Four: OALA Guide to Design Competitions

**This document was prepared by the following members:**

Ian Dance	OALA, FCSLA, Chair
Bob Parkin	OALA, CSLA
Alex Topps	OALA, FCSLA

**and supported by the PP&E Committee:**

Bob Parkin	OALA, CSLA, Chair
Geoff Bayne	OALA, CSLA
Ian Dance	OALA, FCSLA
Cameron Smith	OALA, CSLA

Published by the  
**ONTARIO ASSOCIATION OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS**  
3 Church Street, Suite 506, Toronto, Ontario M5E 1M2  
Phone: 416-231-4181 | [www.oala.ca](http://www.oala.ca) | email: [oala@oala.ca](mailto:oala@oala.ca)

**Copyright © 2019 OALA**  
**All rights reserved**  
**March 9, 2019**

Section	Page
<b>1.0 Introduction</b>	<b>6</b>
1.1 Intent of the Guidelines	6
1.2 Role of the OALA	7
<b>2.0 Objectives and Benefits of a Landscape Architectural Competition</b>	<b>8</b>
2.1 Objectives	8
2.2 Benefits	8
2.2.1 Sponsors	8
2.2.2 Participating Landscape Architects	8
2.2.3 Landscape Architecture Profession	9
2.2.4 The Public	9
<b>3.0 Competition Types</b>	<b>10</b>
3.1 Open Competitions	10
3.2 Limited Competitions	10
3.2.1 Stage One: Short-Listing of Competitors	10
3.2.2 Stage Two: Final Design Competition	11
3.3 Invited Competitions	11
3.4 Ideas Competitions	12
3.5 Public-Private Partnership Competitions	13
<b>4. Roles of Sponsors, Professional Advisors, and the Public</b>	<b>14</b>
4.1 Sponsors	14
4.2 Professional Advisors	14
4.3 The Public	15
<b>5. The Competition Process</b>	<b>16</b>
5.1 Competition Brief	16
5.1.1 Procedural Rules and Conditions	16
5.1.2 Objectives of the Competition	17
5.1.3 Eligibility and Disqualifications	17
5.1.4 Contact Information and Roles	18
5.1.4.1 Competition Manager	18
5.1.4.2 Professional Advisor	18
5.1.4.3 The Jury	19
5.1.4.4 Contact for Questions and Clarifications	19
5.1.5 Entry and Submission Formalities	19
5.1.6 Professional Roles Within the Competition Team	19
5.1.7 Competition Fees and Project Costs	19
5.1.8 Meetings and Deliverables Schedules	20
5.1.8.1 Competition Duration and Timing	20
5.1.8.2 Phased and Multi-Stage Competitions	20
5.1.8.3 Time-Sensitive Submissions	20
5.1.9 Submission of Deliverables	21
5.1.9.1 Anonymity in Submissions	21
5.1.9.2 Basic Submission Requirements	21
5.1.9.3 Level of Documentation Required	22

5.1.9.4	Ownership of Submissions	22
5.1.10	Evaluation Criteria	22
5.1.11	Award and Payment	22
5.1.12	Terms of the Ultimate Design Contract	22
5.2	Technical Briefing and Background Document	23
5.3	Site Access	24
<b>6.</b>	<b>The Jury and Award Process</b>	<b>25</b>
6.1	Jury Composition	25
6.2	Winner Selection	26
6.3	Awards and Payments	27
<b>7.</b>	<b>Marketing and Publication</b>	<b>29</b>

## 1.0 Introduction

Landscape architectural competitions are an important avenue for promoting public understanding of the profession and advancing the practice of landscape architecture. High standards of professionalism and conduct play a vital role in contributing to the success of these competitions. To this end, the Ontario Association of Landscape Architects (OALA) has prepared these Competition Guidelines in support of its members and others planning or participating in a landscape architectural competition in Ontario.

### 1.1 Intent of the Guidelines

This document provides an overview and general guidance for sponsors and participants considering hosting or participating in a landscape architectural competition in Ontario. It covers a diverse range of key topics designed to encourage a successful competition and a creative winning submission.

Each competition is unique; therefore, these Guidelines intend to provide a general understanding of the process only and should be adapted as necessary to fit the specifics of each competition. The types and methods of competitions and the submissions that may be included vary widely, and the approach and process presented in these Guidelines are intended to provide high-level direction applicable to many different situations.

These Guidelines have the following purposes:

- to support fair and equitable competitions;
- to lead to positive outcomes for the sponsors;
- to provide realistic compensation and motivation for the participants;
- to encourage clarity and transparency in the competition process;
- to recognize the significant effort and commitment made by both sponsors and participants; and
- to demonstrate the benefits of a professional advisor-led competition process.

These Guidelines are presented as best practices that are voluntary, not mandatory, but are highly recommended in support of sponsors' efforts to achieve the objectives and benefits of their competitions.

These Guidelines are intended to assist:

- sponsors of a landscape architectural competition;
- landscape architects considering participating in a competition;
- jurors and advisors of a competition; and
- students and others participating in an Ideas Competition.

## 1.2 Role of OALA

The OALA encourages landscape architectural competitions that publicly demonstrate the important role landscape architects play in the design and planning of our built environment. A key aspect of the Association’s mission is to “maintain standards of professional practice and conduct, consistent with the need to serve and to protect the public interest.” As such, the OALA encourages the professional conduct of its members and supports fair, structured, and rewarding competitions that help to promote the growth and awareness of the landscape architecture profession in Ontario.



The OALA has prepared these Competition Guidelines to assist those sponsoring or organizing competitions in developing fair and open competitions. The Association encourages members to participate in those competitions that adopt the OALA’s principles and guidelines. The OALA does not formally endorse, manage, or mediate competitions; however, it reserves the right to sponsor and/or promote competitions upon review and approval by the OALA Governing Council.

The OALA’s involvement in competitions includes the following:

- Upon request, the OALA can provide competition sponsors with a list of senior professionals who have expressed willingness to participate in design juries or to act as advisors or administrators.
- For any competition that follows the OALA Competition Guidelines, the OALA may consider:
  - recognizing the competition and its winning submissions by providing links to the competition on the Association’s website; and
  - upon request, publishing the jury report and the graphic presentation materials submitted by participants.
- To promote the growth, talent, and profile of local landscape architectural professionals, the OALA suggests that Ontario-based competitions in the Open, Limited, and Invited categories have OALA member participation. Out-of-province and international landscape architects participating in Ontario competitions are encouraged to team up with and actively include local OALA members. OALA members offer professional knowledge of local issues, regulations, and codes and can provide critical input during the design stage.
- Should there be concerns about unfair competition conditions or work being requested without compensation, individuals may seek the OALA’s involvement by contacting the Association’s Executive Director. The OALA’s Professional Practice and Ethics Review Committee can be made available to address questions and review complaints, and the OALA may subsequently contact the competition organizers with its concerns.

## 2.0 Objectives and Benefits of a Landscape Architectural Competition

A landscape architectural competition has the potential to bring important and enduring benefits to the industry and its clients as well as the community at large. A clearly articulated objective or set of objectives will go a long way toward helping the sponsoring organization plan and manage the competition in an effective and efficient manner in support of those benefits.

### 2.1 Objectives

The objectives of design competitions can vary widely and typically include one or more of the following:

- selecting a qualified landscape architect or design team for a particular project;
- developing unique or leading-edge design solutions;
- publicly rewarding and recognizing creativity, innovation, and research;
- promoting higher levels of public interest and awareness for a particular project; and
- raising the profile of local landscape architects.

### 2.2 Benefits

Competitions can offer a variety of benefits for sponsors, competitors, the landscape architecture profession, and the public.

#### 2.2.1 Sponsors

For sponsors, a landscape architecture competition offers an opportunity to take full advantage of the combined vision of multiple landscape architectural professionals putting forward a variety of design approaches and philosophies. This has the potential of producing a broad range of solutions that deliver levels of advanced innovation and creativity not generally provided by standard commissions. As a result, sponsors can select from multiple submissions to obtain a highly innovative solution that also closely matches their particular project vision.

A highly visible and successful competition can also bring positive attention to and greatly enhance the identity and reputation of the sponsoring companies or public institutions. This is particularly the case with competitions that demonstrate a commitment to design excellence, promote sustainable environmental development solutions, and deliver animated and inviting public spaces.

#### 2.2.2 Participating Landscape Architects

For participating landscape architects, competitions present opportunities to demonstrate their design talents, explore emerging creative trends, and promote a particular corporate philosophy, thereby enhancing their profile and stature in both

the design community and local market. For an established firm seeking to refine emerging aspects of its design philosophy, competitions also offer opportunities to depart from its long-established market profile and design reputation as it forges a fresh new approach.

Additionally, competitions are particularly valuable to smaller start-up firms, allowing them to raise their visibility and professional profile. For individual members of design teams, especially recent graduates, competitions provide opportunities to exercise their design talents, build personal confidence, and showcase their skills to employers and colleagues.

### **2.2.3 Landscape Architecture Profession**

For the landscape architecture profession, competitions generate desirable public awareness and understanding of the issues that landscape architects routinely deal with and the types of solutions they provide. Competitions are an effective format and method for marketing landscape architectural services to the public and for illustrating a range of creative solutions and ideas.

### **2.2.4 The Public**

For the public, competitions often create opportunities to gain insight into important local projects and the critical underlying issues. In some cases, competitions can be organized in a way that allows for and encourages active public participation in the design process. Some competition formats invite the public to participate in the design review and selection process.

## 3.0 Competition Types

Design competitions take many different forms but typically fall into one of the following categories:

- Open Competition
- Limited Competition
- Invited Competition
- Ideas Competition
- Public and Private Partnership Competition

### 3.1 Open Competitions

Open Competitions may be conducted in a single phase or multiple phases and are typically reserved for projects of great international, national, or civic importance. Compensation for the winners can vary widely in both type and scale, but it usually involves commissioning the winner to carry out the follow-up design project and issuing cash awards to two or more runners-up. Indirect benefits for all competitors include most notably the public exposure and acclaim that come with their participation.

In general, Open Competitions have the following characteristics:

- They are best utilized for projects that must deliver the highest standard of design excellence and innovation.
- They are intended for projects aiming to draw from an unrestricted pool of designers.
- They are suitable mainly for projects that are very large in scale and technically complex and that require multi-disciplinary teams.
- They are governed by rigorous project-specific rules and procedures that have been crafted by expert advisors.
- They are adjudicated by a renowned panel of design experts.

### 3.2 Limited Competitions

Limited Competitions typically consist of two stages, with the first stage focused on selecting a short list of competitors and the second stage devoted to the design competition itself. This type of competition is used mainly to attract participants from the local area.

#### 3.2.1 Stage One: Short-Listing of Competitors

In general, the initial short-listing stage of a Limited Competition has the following characteristics:

- It typically results in the selection of three to five competitors from the initial

submissions.

- The selection is based solely on a fair and rigorous examination of the technical qualifications and design excellence of the firms, design teams, and particular individuals providing submissions.
- The process places no particular limit or constraints on which firms or design teams can participate or on the number of initial entrants.
- This first stage limits the size of the submissions, typically to fewer than 10 pages including text and supporting graphic material, and does not require the participants to submit a specific design.
- The participants, including the short-listed competitors, are not compensated for their work, nor are their submissions published.

### 3.2.2 Stage Two: Final Design Competition

In general, the final design competition stage of a Limited Competition has the following characteristics:

- The short-listed competitors are engaged in a formal, time-limited design process.
- The competitors agree to follow a published set of strict rules and standards.
- All design submissions are made anonymously.
- The entries are impartially adjudicated by an independent jury.
- All of the short-listed competitors are compensated.
- The submissions of the short-listed competitors are typically published.

This serves to provide the competitors with public recognition for their work and to raise the profile of local landscape architects in general. It also serves to promote public interest and awareness of a particular project.

### 3.3 Invited Competitions

Invited Competitions are similar to Limited Competitions except that the participants typically consist of three to five firms that have been pre-selected by the sponsor.

In general, Invited Competitions have the following characteristics:

- The sponsor pre-selects the competitors by assessing a number of different firms' demonstrated experience with similar projects. These assessments are usually based on the sponsor's or professional advisor's technical review of those firms' project experience, and may also include an interview process.
- The submissions are not anonymous.

- The process involves a formal presentation of the design by each competing firm.

In all other respects, the process is similar to stage two of a Limited Competition, as described in the previous section, including the provision of compensation to the competitors and the publication of their submissions.

### 3.4 Ideas Competitions

Ideas Competitions, as the name suggests, typically aim to focus on ideas rather than involve projects that will eventually be implemented. They are generally conducted to draw public attention to a significant local design and/or public policy issue, and are mainly intended to generate an ongoing public dialogue. They may also be conducted simply to stimulate and benefit the design community.

Ideas Competitions, by definition, are unrestricted and usually open to all design disciplines and all categories of participants, including professional design firms, ad hoc consortiums, public artists, students, and members of the public. Compensation for winners and runners-up is generally limited to the resulting public exposure and acclaim, but may include a small honorarium paid to the competitor who submitted the winning idea.



### 3.5 Public-Private Partnership Competitions

Public-Private Partnership (P3) Competitions are large-scale competitions that include a wide range of partnering scenarios. The competition teams may consist of designers, builders, financial backers, facility operators, and others. The process is typically very complex and time-consuming, and it usually requires the landscape architect to develop the site design and specifications to a high level of detail in order to be able to support and accurately price the proposal submission.

The level of commitment undertaken in most recent P3 competitions have gone well beyond that required in any other competition format. In many cases, the design development effort has been equivalent to, and sometimes exceeded, that required of a full contract drawing submission. Consequently, the staffing resources, time commitment, and out-of-pocket expenses incurred can be very onerous. To address this issue, one approach sponsors have taken is to provide payment to competitors for the costs incurred, along with bonus payments to the winning team. This approach can be regarded as a minimum baseline for compensation.

In a P3 Competition, the landscape architect is typically contracted either directly or indirectly with a general contractor and therefore in a secondary role with limited direct contact with the client group. This effectively hinders the landscape architect's ability to negotiate fees and manage the very significant project risks. When deciding whether to participate, it would be prudent to undertake a thorough evaluation of the pros and cons based on a variety of possible compensation outcomes.

A landscape architect who is part of a winning consortium also needs to recognize that it is common for the P3 lead to require numerous post-award revisions in order to bring the project costs into alignment with their financial plan. In addition, it's important to be aware that these changes are often imposed on consultants without compensation.

## 4.0 Roles of Sponsors, Professional Advisors, and the Public

Sponsors, professional advisors, and members of the public all have key roles to play in contributing to the success of landscape architectural competitions.

### 4.1 Sponsors

The sponsoring organization occupies the central, most important role in a competition, as it is the initiator who establishes the process, provides the funding, and coordinates the competition, and it is also the primary beneficiary of the outcome.

Sponsor responsibilities include:

- ensuring fairness and transparency;
- establishing clear objectives and requirements;
- identifying the criteria for selecting a winning submission;
- committing to the award(s) and any other payments to be given to the winner(s) and other competitors, as defined at the outset; and
- engaging an advisor, if deemed beneficial or necessary, to manage or oversee the competition (this is particularly important for a first-time sponsor).

### 4.2 Professional Advisors

Engaging a professional advisor is optional but is a best practice particularly for sponsors without previous sponsorship experience. Working with such an advisor will also help to promote fairness in competitions.

A sponsor may hire a professional advisor to assist in the initial organization of the competition, and subsequently engage the advisor to take on a follow-up role of managing and administrating the competition's day-to-day operation. Professional advisors are typically compensated at their standard hourly rates, with all related expenses fully covered.

Sponsors may contact the OALA's Executive Director to obtain a list of potential professional advisors. Their qualifications typically include:

- a licence to practise as a landscape architect in Canada;
- membership in the OALA or Canadian Society of Landscape Architects (CSLA);
- an absence of any conflict of interest (COI) with respect to the outcome of the competition or, should a real, perceived, or potential COI exist, a demonstration of professional ethics, integrity, and transparency by providing a clear statement of COI disclosure;
- strong technical knowledge of the type of project associated with the competition;
- previous experience as a competitor, professional advisor, and/or juror in one or

more landscape architectural competitions; and

- the ability to work well with sponsor organizations to achieve the goals of the competition and related project.

The professional advisor may be required to assume a significant responsibility depending on the contractual arrangements and the sponsor's level of involvement. The professional advisor's tasks often include:

- confirming that the competition is feasible;
- defining and putting in place the competition's format and rules;
- preparing the information package for the competitors;
- arranging and coordinating the process of registering and qualifying competitors;
- centrally managing the information flow during the competition;
- assisting the jury and managing the process for selecting the winning submission(s);
- compiling the jury's comments and reports;
- ensuring the distribution of award(s) and any other payments to the winner(s) and other competitors; and
- managing marketing and social media efforts before, during, and following the competition.

### **4.3 The Public**

Involvement of the public in a landscape architecture competition is an important strategic decision, often helping to create realistic design solutions, promote positive local support, and generally stimulate broad public enthusiasm for the sponsor's project. Members of the public frequently have intimate knowledge of the site and surrounding community and are able to highlight specific local issues unknown to the sponsor and competitors.

Depending on how the competition is organized, members of the public can be actively engaged in the process in a variety of ways. For example, they can be called on to provide early contextual input to the sponsor and participants, comment on the submissions at various stages of the competition, and offer observations near the end of the process to assist the jury in its selection of the winning entry.

## 5.0 The Competition Process

A well-defined and clearly articulated competition process promotes fairness and transparency and can help to promote participation. Key components typically include a competition brief, a technical briefing, and one or more site visits. Effective delivery of these components will allow the sponsoring organization to demonstrate its commitment to the process, to the objectives and benefits of the competition, and to all those involved.

### 5.1 Competition Brief

The competition brief is a document issued at the outset of the process that provides the complete terms of reference for the competition. It establishes the sponsor's expectations, outlines the project vision, and provides a detailed outline of the objectives, process, rules and conditions, required deliverables, and timeline of submissions and presentations.

The competition brief is especially important in the initial stages of the process, as it enables potential participants to carefully evaluate their participation based on a clear understanding of the purpose and scope of the competition, the expertise required, and all submission requirements. Having a full understanding from the outset will allow participants to effectively schedule their existing workload, organize staff resources, and manage their time and effort accordingly to meet the requirements of the competition.

It is also incumbent upon sponsors to recognize that subsequent changes to competition requirements or compensation arrangements create frustration and hardship for competitors and can hinder their ability to put forth their best efforts.

A competition brief that is clear and comprehensive will promote fairness in the process and establish the foundation for the competition to be run effectively as it works toward its objectives. Due to the substantial volume of information and level of detail typically covered in a competition brief, it is a best practice to retain a professional advisor to prepare the document.

This section outlines many of the components commonly found in a competition brief. It should be noted, however, that the following list is not exhaustive, as competition formats vary widely based on the specific project requirements.

#### 5.1.1 Procedural Rules and Conditions

A key part of the competition brief is a section devoted to procedural rules and conditions. The items to be clearly specified in this section include, but are not limited to, entry qualifications, contact information, key submission and presentation dates, formalities related to the preparation and delivery of submissions, opportunities for site reviews, mandatory presentation and meeting dates, and details of the award.

### 5.1.2 Objectives of the Competition

The objectives of the competition define the project priorities and vision from the perspective of the sponsor. It is key information that will help to guide the participants and constructively influence their direction and decision-making during their design development work.

### 5.1.3 Eligibility and Disqualifications

Carefully articulating the qualifications required for entering the competition, along with any entry limitations, will avoid inappropriate applications and save time for all concerned. Eligibility will naturally be restricted in the case of Invited Competitions. Open Competitions may explicitly stipulate that only Canadian or Ontario firms can enter. Competitions involving multi-disciplinary teams may consider making it a requirement that an OALA member be part of the design team. A contractual conflict of interest with public agencies or competing commercial projects may lead to disqualification.



Image: 2018 CSLA Awards of Excellence Jurors deliberating in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

## 5.1.4 Contact Information and Roles

The names, contact information, and roles and responsibilities of the key individuals involved in the competition are essential information to include in the competition brief. These key individuals include the sponsor, the sponsor's designated representatives, the professional advisor (if one is engaged), technical advisors, the competition manager, and any other key contacts.

### 5.1.4.1 Competition Manager

The competition manager is the individual or firm responsible for the day-to-day management of the competition process and is charged with supervising the conduct of the competition. This role serves as the central point of contact for the competitors when they register for the competition and subsequently when they have questions to submit for clarification. The competition manager also organizes and manages all meetings and presentations, distributes documents, and receives final submissions.

The role of the competition manager may be combined with that of the professional advisor. Specifically, if there is no professional advisor, then the competition manager may be responsible for the roles that a professional advisor would typically play, including assisting the jury and distributing award payments, as discussed in the section below.

### 5.1.4.2 Professional Advisor

As noted earlier, engagement of a professional advisor is optional and at the sponsor's discretion. However, having the guidance of a professional advisor is often helpful and especially valuable for sponsors unfamiliar with the competition process.

It is important to clearly identify the name of the professional advisor, if one is engaged, in the competition brief, as involvement of a particular advisor may influence potential participants' decisions whether or not to enter the competition.

During the competition, the scope of the professional advisor's role can extend well beyond that of the competition manager. It may include assisting the jury to manage the winner selection process, compiling jury comments and reports, ensuring distribution of award payments to the winners, and managing marketing efforts associated with the competition.

### 5.1.4.3 The Jury

It is important to provide full disclosure at the outset of the competition by including in the competition brief the names and professional resumes of the members

of the jury. The makeup of the jury is another factor that can influence potential participants' decisions whether or not to enter the competition, as it may signal, and possibly emphasize, the sponsor's intentions.

#### 5.1.4.4 Contact for Questions and Clarifications

During the competition, all questions relating to process, such as regarding meetings, updates, and interpretation of information, are typically addressed by the competition manager. As noted earlier, a single individual may serve the dual role of competition manager and professional advisor, or two separate individuals may undertake the two roles. Whichever is the case, it is important for the competition brief to clearly indicate the name and contact information of the individual responsible for responding to questions.

#### 5.1.5 Entry and Submission Formalities

Another key component of the competition brief is a clear section outlining the formalities for entering the competition and for making eventual submissions. It is important for this section to include a complete package of entry forms and to clarify the registration fees (if any are required). Competitions typically require all entry documents and the eventual submissions to be delivered by a qualified courier or by registered mail, as proof of delivery, by the stipulated submission time and date.

#### 5.1.6 Professional Roles Within the Competition Team

Landscape architectural competitions often require entrants to participate in the form of competition teams each involving a range of professional roles. In this case, the competition brief will clarify the role of each professional required as well as confirm the professional who will serve as the lead consultant, or the primary consultant leading the competition team.

For competitions where the award is a contract to carry out an ultimate design project, the lead consultant of the winning team will typically become the lead consultant on the project. However, contractual and insurance requirements may exist, or may later come into play, that can have an impact on the selection of the lead consultant and the execution of the contract. Therefore, for this type of competition, it is important for the competition brief to set out in advance the terms and conditions to be followed in this situation.

#### 5.1.7 Competition Fees and Project Costs

Clarity around competition fees and reimbursements for project costs is another key element in the competition brief that will help to inform potential participants and encourage those who are a good fit for the competition. If competitors are

expected to pay an entry fee, clearly identifying the amount and timing will allow potential participants to be fully informed and to take this into consideration in their decision. Similarly, if the sponsor is offering payments to participants, such as honorariums or reimbursement for participants' printing and reproduction expenses or other project costs, an appropriate section in the competition brief can be used to clarify the extent and terms of such payments.

### **5.1.8 Meetings and Deliverables Schedules**

Schedules for required meetings and deliverables are another essential component in the competition brief. The related items to be clearly identified include the specific deliverables and their submission deadlines; the dates and locations of meetings, interviews, and any media encounters; and information on submission phasing for those deliverables that are to be submitted in phases. These items provide critical information that describes the full scope of effort required and is often a key determining factor in a participant's decision whether to pursue the competition.

#### **5.1.8.1 Competition Duration and Timing**

A competition that allows sufficient time for the competitors to develop their design submissions will more likely result in higher-quality submissions. Another detail to keep in mind is to take major holiday periods into consideration when scheduling activities and key deadlines for the submission of deliverables.

#### **5.1.8.2 Phased and Multi-Stage Competitions**

Some competitions employ multiple stages, such as Limited Competitions, which typically start with a pre-selection stage. Additionally, a competition may require particular deliverables to be submitted in phases. In these situations, important information to set out in the competition brief includes the scheduled dates and details of the successive meetings, benchmarking presentations, and other requirements that competitors must successfully navigate in order to move on to the next stage or phase.

#### **5.1.8.3 Time-Sensitive Submissions**

Competitions typically require all submissions to be delivered by a fixed deadline. The competition brief can help to promote clarity and professionalism by clearly stating that all late submissions will be rejected. In the case of phased or multi-stage competitions, clearly indicating all intermediate and final submission dates will go a long way toward avoiding confusion.

## 5.1.9 Submission of Deliverables

Another key component of the competition brief is a section on the requirements surrounding the submission of deliverables. Important issues to address include anonymity, uniformity, completeness of the requirements specification, reasonable expectations, and ownership of the submissions.

### 5.1.9.1 Anonymity in Submissions

Using fully anonymous submissions promotes fairness. The competition brief can support this principle by setting out a rigorous process to ensure submissions are completely anonymous (except for Invited Competitions). This can be accomplished by requiring all submissions and packaging to display only an identifying serial number issued by the competition manager or professional advisor.

At the same time, all submissions must be accompanied by a suitable declaration of authorship and proof of identity. Competitors should also be aware that submission of a design and provision of their declarations and proof of identity imply their acceptance of all competition conditions.

### 5.1.9.2 Basic Submission Requirements

It is important for the competition brief to clearly describe a process that is uniform for all parties and to specify all relevant and essential requirements that must be submitted in order to qualify for evaluation by the jury.

Basic submission requirements typically include the physical dimensions of submissions, drawing scales, required presentation media, and the specific number of drawings, panels, and/or models that need to be provided. To ensure consistency among the final submissions, other requirements important to define include the number of illustrated views that can be provided on the panels, the content and length of any supporting texts, and the types of cost estimates required.

Particular care is recommended when outlining the requirements for submitting additional or optional images and plans, if they are permitted, as this often leads to confusion. Any additional drawings, models, or proprietary information submitted by a competitor that goes beyond what is permitted are typically disregarded. In serious cases, submission of such additional material may provide sufficient grounds for disqualification. It is important for these rules to be clearly stated in the competition brief.

It is also a best practice to require both hardcopy and digital submissions.

### 5.1.9.3 Level of Documentation Required

In recent years there has been an ever-increasing requirement for costly documentation as part of competition submissions, and unfortunately this practice is becoming the norm. Sponsors should be aware that elaborate computer simulations, 3D renderings, advanced technical drawings, and detailed models are very costly and time-consuming to produce and may inhibit participation. It is therefore important for the competition brief to define reasonable expectations.

A reasonable approach is to require only the level of documentation that is essential for allowing competitors to clearly present their creative solutions and for helping jurors make an informed decision. Likewise, it would be appropriate to scale the monetary award such that it properly reflects the effort involved.

### 5.1.9.4 Ownership of Submissions

Authors of the landscape architectural component of design competition submissions retain the artistic copyright such that alterations may not be made without their formal consent. It is recommended that this be stated in the competition brief.

## 5.1.10 Evaluation Criteria

The criteria for reviewing and evaluating submissions are needed at the outset of the competition and are to be included in the competition brief. There are various methodologies for reviewing and evaluating submissions; however, it is inappropriate to make changes to the identified approach during the course of the competition.

## 5.1.11 Award and Payment

The competition brief is also to include a clear specification of the size of the award and the contractual conditions and timing of any related follow-up project. For more details on the award process, see Section 6: The Jury and Award Process.

## 5.1.12 Terms of the Ultimate Design Contract

If the award is to result in a project contract, the competition brief will need to provide a clear definition of the ownership of submitted drawings and the contractual terms of the project agreement the winning team will be asked to sign. It will also provide disclosure of the sponsor's insurance requirements and any dispute resolution mechanisms being considered. These are important elements that the competitors and ultimate winner need to understand as they contemplate the obligations of moving beyond the initial award into the follow-up contract stages.

## 5.2 Technical Briefing and Background Document

All competitions, regardless of type, include preparation of a detailed technical background document for the confirmed competitors. In addition to the background document, it would also be helpful for the sponsor to provide a technical briefing session, either at the site or at the sponsor's office, with representatives from regulatory agencies and any existing project consultants.

A major purpose of the background document is to provide sufficient detail so that the competitors in their design submissions can appropriately respond to known site conditions, programmatic standards, critical regulatory issues, and the sponsor's financial resources. It's important to note that too often past competitions have generated visions that were unique and innovative but failed to take these constraints into account and therefore regrettably had to be rejected by the jury.

A complete technical package will typically provide a detailed description of the project context equivalent to the information that would be provided to a firm engaged in a conventional design commission. It would be helpful to provide some images, perhaps along with links to larger collections of images or more extensive background information. For packages that are issued electronically, which is now often the case, keeping to a manageable file size is important. Below is a partial checklist of potential information to include:

- current and accurate topographic and legal survey information for the site, supplied fully in digital format;
- detailed sponsor input such as the business plan, site programming, required facilities, end use, seasonal access needs, traffic and parking needs, operational and maintenance considerations, and phasing issues;
- precise budgetary limits for all program components;
- input from potential end users, the public, building occupants, and other stakeholders;
- environmental constraints, below-grade and foundation conditions, services and utilities, and soil information;
- wind and shadow studies along with photographs that illustrate specific or special site conditions in different seasons;
- zoning regulations; and
- all background studies and reports that convey technical aspects and planning criteria for the site.

### 5.3 Site Access

As a guiding principle, all competitors typically have various levels of access to the site and its surrounding areas so that they can properly reflect the character and spatial quality of the property in their design solutions. Below are some common site access considerations to potentially incorporate into the competition process:

- An initial site visit for the competitors and all existing project consultants is typically organized so that all participants have an opportunity to pose questions to the technical team and obtain clarification on specific site conditions and constraints. This initial site visit is often combined with the technical briefing session, particularly to help save time and minimize cost if some travel to the site location is required.
- It is a best practice to arrange for physical preparation of the property prior to the initial site visit so that the visitors have access to as much of the property as is both reasonable and safe. It is also helpful to have visual markers in place to clearly display the boundaries of the competition site.
- Sponsors are also encouraged to provide the competitors with unencumbered site access throughout the rest of the competition process and timeframe, subject to advance notice, safe access conditions, and consent.
- Sponsors may wish to consider holding an on-site discussion of site issues and contextual background matters with representatives from the community and regulatory authorities.
- It would be prudent for sponsors to conduct site visits with appropriate attention to health and safety best practices. Sponsors are also encouraged, where possible, to consider putting in place policies that support Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) standards.

## 6.0 The Jury and Award Process

The jury and award process has a critical role to play in supporting competitions that are fair and equitable and that meet high professional and ethical standards. Key parts of the process typically include designing the jury and appointing the jurors, selecting the winner, and providing awards and payments as compensation for competition-related work.

### 6.1 Jury Composition

The jury for a landscape architectural competition typically consists of a variety of experts with the combined professional and local knowledge required to properly evaluate the submissions, fairly adjudicate the award, and fully explain the selection decision in its jury report. Participation on a design competition jury is often an onerous and serious commitment; therefore, jurors are customarily compensated for their time at their standard per diem rates (or a representative equivalent).

It is also a best practice to appoint an unbiased professional advisor to assist the jury in its deliberations. (See Section 4.2 for details on the professional advisor's role and qualifications.)

A jury can be structured in a variety of ways but typically has the following characteristics:

- It consists of professional peers drawn principally from the landscape architecture profession and various related design disciplines. It may also include local community representatives as well as other individuals with particular understandings or expertise related to the site.
- Its members are listed in all of the competition's published literature and promotional materials so as to properly recognize their contribution.
- It is composed of professionals with demonstrated experience in the specific project type, ideally in a similar regional context.
- Its members do not have any connection with the selected competitors or any financial or indirect interest in the outcome.
- Its members are able to operate independently and are insulated from the influence of any external political considerations.
- It includes a minimum of three members with one vote each, and is always composed of an uneven number of members in order to avoid the possibility of a tie vote.

## 6.2 Winner Selection

Fairness and transparency are principles that are important to uphold in the judging procedures used for selecting the winner. In this context, the procedures generally follow the best practices described below:

- The jury selects a chairperson from among its members to lead all jury discussions.
- The jury appoints a secretary from among its members to record jury comments and document the decisions.
- The jury's deliberations are confidential. No jury members or other participants in the selection process, such as the professional advisor or any other individual who had been identified at the outset, are permitted to disclose details of the jury discussions beyond the published results.
- The sponsor, or the professional advisor engaged by the sponsor, will provide the jury with the reviewing and evaluation criteria as documented in the competition brief.
- In the process of reviewing and evaluating submissions, the specific procedure used by the jury to track and assign scores to the submissions may or may not have been defined at the outset and provided as part of the competition brief. If such a procedure had not been provided, the jury will establish its own procedure and, upon the announcement of the winning design, share the details of the procedure with the competitors.
- Each jury member has one vote, and decisions are valid only when every member is present. The winner is decided by a simple majority vote.
- The jury's decision is normally documented in written form signed by all jury members. The written summary is then provided to the sponsor.
- The decision of the jury is binding on the sponsor.
- The jury is typically required to meet and reach a decision within one month of the submissions. The sponsor is then required to publicly announce the decision within two weeks of the jury decision.
- The jury is also responsible for producing a summary report that includes the general comments related to each submission.
- The jury may also be asked to provide direction on the order of the prizes to be awarded to the runners-up.
- The jury's report is to be provided to all competitors at the time the winning entry is announced.

### 6.3 Awards and Payments

The OALA's Code of Ethics requires that all work, or services, undertaken, including competition-related work, be provided with compensation. The relevant clauses are as follows:

4.1 Upon selection to provide required services, the member shall have reached agreement with the client or employer as to the nature and extent of such services and the compensation which will be forthcoming.

4.2 A member shall provide landscape architectural services for remuneration that is fully disclosed to the client, and which is both fair and reasonable.

These Competition Guidelines further confirm that competition-related work is considered to be professional services as set out in the clauses above, and therefore such work is to be provided in exchange for compensation.

It is understood that some competition formats will potentially provide only small payments and honorariums for basic ideas that do not require extensive effort. However, for larger competitions, such as Public-Private Partnership Competitions, where extensive work is required, it is appropriate to expect reasonable compensation to be provided for the services delivered. Additional information on compensation is detailed in the [OALA Fee Guide for Landscape Architectural Services](#).

Key considerations are set out below for defining the financial award and payment process of a landscape architectural competition:

- In principle, all participants in a competition should have the prospect of receiving a fair and reasonable financial reward.
- At a minimum, the award should recognize that participation in any competition is an expensive and time-consuming process for landscape architects. Consequently, the compensation should reflect the true effort involved and be sufficient to ensure that the very best landscape architects are attracted to participate with their best efforts.
- There is typically only one formal award event, and payment generally occurs within 30 days after the jury completes its deliberations. However, in the case of multi-phased competitions, payments may be timed to coincide with each completed phase or interim presentation event.
- Awards will typically be given to the winner and two runners-up, regardless of the type of competition; however, sponsors are encouraged to recognize the effort of all competitors.
- More specifically, Invited Competitions typically provide compensation to all competitors, and Open and Limited Competitions generally offer from three to five awards. The compensation for participation in an Ideas Competition is

often limited to an honorarium, in addition to the intangible marketing benefit of publication and display of the competition entries.

- For competitions in which the award is in the form of a contract to carry out the follow-up full-scope design project, it is best practice for the sponsor to formally acknowledge and appoint the winning competitor as the lead consultant for executing the finished design, and to promptly enter into the follow-up contract. In this situation, the amount of the award is often credited against the fee to be paid for the follow-up contract.
- For runners-up, a typical measure of fair compensation is the value of the work done for the conceptual design stage of the competition plus HST and any out-of-pocket expenses that are subject to reimbursement. Again, it is best practice to promptly pay the runners-up the cash value of their awards and related compensation.

## 7.0 Marketing and Publication

---

While winners and runners-up may receive financial awards, for most of the competitors often the only reasonable prospect of compensation is the public exposure and acclaim that come with their participation. It should also be noted that participation costs often vastly outweigh the financial rewards, even for the winners. A sponsor organization can demonstrate its recognition of this reality and its appreciation to all competitors by prominently displaying the efforts of all competitors in its project literature and marketing materials. The names of all competitors are typically published except for the names of those who specifically requested otherwise.

Upon the award announcement, publishing the jury's award recommendations, including its final report as well as images and descriptions of all submissions, will allow a sponsor to demonstrate its commitment to fairness and transparency. It is also common for sponsors to host an exhibit of all submitted designs in an accessible public venue, typically for two weeks, before returning the submissions to the competitors. However, the sponsors will often keep the award-winning submissions rather than returning them.

In support of competitions that follow the OALA's Competition Guidelines, the OALA would be pleased to post on the Association's website the links to these competitions' jury reports, including the related descriptions and digital images of all submissions.

## End of Part Four

The ***Engaging a Landscape Architect*** series has been prepared in four (4) separate parts as guide publications, under the following titles:

- Part One:* OALA Guide to Landscape Architectural Services
- Part Two:* OALA Fee Guide for Landscape Architectural Services (*this volume*)
- Part Three:* OALA Guide to Standard Written Agreements
- Part Four:* OALA Guide to Design Competitions

Please go to the Engaging a Landscape Architect page on [www.oala.ca](http://www.oala.ca) to read and learn more about each publication.

Published by the  
**ONTARIO ASSOCIATION OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS**  
3 Church Street, Suite 506, Toronto, Ontario M5E 1M2  
Phone: 416-231-4181 | [www.oala.ca](http://www.oala.ca) | email: [oala@oala.ca](mailto:oala@oala.ca)

**Copyright © 2019 OALA**  
**All rights reserved**  
**March 9, 2019**