

## 11 Questions You Should Ask: A Guide to Finding a Trusted Retrofit Project Partner

*By now, you have surely come to understanding how and why an energy efficient lighting upgrade can benefit your business. Not only that it can save energy and have a positive environmental impact, but also that the right kind of project will boost your bottom line while actually adding value to your facility. And some studies say it can even improve employee productivity!*

*And since you are set on investing in such a project, you must find an experienced, capable contractor with integrity and a vast knowledge of the lighting industry. Finding a trusted partner is not always the easiest task, but this article can point out some important questions to consider when choosing a firm to work with on your lighting project.*

**Is the scope of work on your quote clearly laid out with quantities of each existing and proposed lighting solution? Does the quote detail a set price for the work? Or are the quoted prices “approximate”?**

Don't be sold on an approximated quote. Look for a vendor who provides a clear scope of work, and a quote that can show you a real world project price. If your contractor hasn't taken the time to show you exactly what technology is being installed alongside what is being taken out, be aware that you may not be seeing an accurate model of savings for your project.

**How much does the system comparison/energy audit/lighting study cost me?**

Sometimes there is an upfront fee from engineering companies, environmental firms or other organizations claiming they can save you money with an energy efficient lighting upgrade. **Be sure you are clear on what services they provide.** Some simply provide the very expensive before and after lighting system model and product specs, but do not perform any of the work to upgrade your lights. And other firms don't even offer a comprehensive lighting study. They merely use a cookie-cutter solution to reduce your energy consumption, without taking into consideration your facility requirements.

**Look for a partner that can offer a lighting study that:**

- Thoroughly explains the lighting upgrade model
- Clearly shows what you will see in your facility before and after your retrofit
- Illustrates how your new lighting solution saves energy, but also best meets your needs
- The pricing of your lighting study is commensurate with the service you are receiving

**Note:** Your lighting auditor should be easily able to address existing lighting deficiencies or over-lighting concerns with you, and explain why their chosen lighting solutions will work best for your facility.

**I have heard about incentives for efficient lighting. How do I receive my utility rebate?**

Be sure to ask your chosen retrofit company or electrical contractor, if rebates are available for your lighting project. If they are available find out how rebates or incentives will be applied to the cost of your lighting project. **Ask the following questions:**

- Will I be reimbursed by you (the lighting contractor) or will a check come to me from the utility company?
- Or will the rebate/incentive amount be taken off the project price?
- Do I have to complete and submit the rebate paperwork myself? Or do you (the electrical contractor) submit it on my behalf?

**Can the contractor offer options that meet your needs or goals for a lighting project?**

For example, a contractor should be able to provide options based on your most important lighting project goal showing things like:

Option 1: Best Payback

Option 2: Best overall investment and long-term savings

Option 3: Improved working conditions, light quality, etc.

You should have a choice and they should be knowledgeable enough to explain options that make sense for your objective. It isn't *always* all about energy savings.

**If energy savings isn't the goal of my retrofit project, what is the point of installing a new lighting system?**

Projects like a lighting upgrade are facility “improvements” which often times include energy savings while capturing fiscal savings and/or a rebate. A contractor should discuss with you the uses of the different areas of a facility and determine with you if more or less light could be used.

For example: If your lighting level is currently inadequate, why upgrade to a level you weren't satisfied with before the project? **You may need brighter lights and benefit from improved productivity.**

Or conversely, if your employees or building occupants can perform their tasks in a lower light level, *why pay to provide more light than what is adequate?* Lower light levels could increase your savings, and you may not even notice the difference due to an *improved light quality.*

**Does the contractor employ a CLMC (Certified Lighting Management Consultant) or equivalent?**

Professional electricians are one thing. Professionals in the lighting efficiency industry are quite another. Ensure that your chosen contractor or vendor has at least one staff with CLMC or equivalent certification. This certification ensures a high level of technical competence and knowledge in the lighting industry. **A contractor of this caliber will be able to explain the reasons for their lighting recommendations** beyond what a typical electrical contractor may be able to describe. This certification harkens back to the previous point in this article: *a standard electrical contractor may have the technical know-how to properly install your new lighting system and may even save you some energy or money, but they may or may not have the technical savvy of a certified lighting consultant.*

**What types of products (lamps, ballasts, fixtures) will be installed for your project? Are you getting lamps and ballasts from a reputable brand with a warranty that will cover problems?**

Ask which brand of products will be installed in your facility. Be sure you are not receiving an off-brand, made somewhere that nobody talks about by a manufacturer that will run the other direction if you have catastrophic failure within their warranty period. Choose a brand name you have heard and rest easy knowing the products that will be installed have been thoroughly lab tested and approved. As with most other purchases in life, it is also true with lighting products: *You get what you pay for.*

**Note:** Also of note for those concerned with maintenance savings – to reduce maintenance costs, consider reducing your inventory of required lamp technology. For example, if you can standardize the types of lamps, or bulbs, used in your facility and install ‘Long Life’ products, you can dramatically cut time invested in maintaining your lighting system.

**Is the labor for our job going to a sub-contractor? Who will actually do the installation?**

Find out the relationship between the firm providing the energy study, or lighting audit, at your facility and the crews that will actually install your energy-efficient lighting upgrade. Communication between the Sales side and the Installation side of your project is essential. **Be sure all your lighting project requirements that were addressed in the sales discussions of your project are clearly communicated to the crews who will install.** In other words, ask if your retrofitter is offering a turn-key service, or request credentials for the crews performing the work.

**After the job is finished, what happens to the materials that were removed? Who is responsible for recycling your old lamps and ballasts?**

Many electrical contractors do not offer a recycling service, and you will be left to find a recycler on your own. So, consider all costs included in your quote and determine whether or not recycling is included. Some contractors offer what may seem like a bargain deal, but

*are you receiving all the services required to successfully complete your lighting project?*

Don't be caught off guard when a contractor has left you with a pile of recyclables at the end of a job. **Ask if your Universal Wastes will be recycled safely by a reputable company and if that cost is included in your project price.**

**Note:** If your contractor does not recycle Universal Wastes after the job, be sure you have a plan for storing discarded items for recycling until your recycler can remove them. *Do you have packaging to safely store and transport your Universal Waste Lamps and Ballasts?*

**Does your contractor offer to stand behind the warranty and service the warranty until its expiration date? Do they follow up to ensure you're satisfied?**

If the answer is “no” to either of these questions or if your contractor does not offer detailed warranty descriptions of the *who-covers-what* for materials and services you purchase, consider asking them some specific questions about your warranted items.

- Which of my items have a warranty? (Or which do not?)
- How long is the warranty period for each?
- Do I call you (the installer) to make my claim, or must I contact the manufacturer directly?
- Do you have a warranty on labor?
- How long is the warranty period for your labor?

Their warranty explanations may be simple or wordy, just make sure you understand who is accountable and who should be called in the event of a warranty claim.

**Can the contractor share stories of past successes? Do they have a list of past/present clients that will vouch for their professionalism? How long have they been in business?**

All valid questions! Everyone knows that choosing a contractor can be a really difficult task, so take your time and ask for references. If a contractor cannot or will not provide references or success stories, no matter how long they have been in the industry, you have every right to question their credibility, capability and experience.

Find a contractor that is willing to be your partner, show you instances of jobs well done, and who can show you the customer statements that illustrate savings were achieved as a result of a lighting project. Some contractors may even have customers at facilities previously worked in willing to let you tour and see for yourself exactly how quality work was achieved. •