

# Request for Proposals: Report on Fee Challenges in Private Landscape Architecture Practice (2026)

## Introduction

The Canadian Society of Landscape Architects is proposing to undertake a study on fees in the landscape architecture profession. This study goal is to investigate the structural and cultural barriers that prevent private firms from charging fees that are in line with those of their professional peers – and the impact this has on firm sustainability and professional compensation across Canada. A consultant will be tasked with:

1. Collecting data and advice or methodologies on fees in landscape architecture and related professions (architecture, planning, engineering) and identifying the range of variables, such as geography, cost of living, gender gap, regulatory context, procurement and bidding practices, size or scale of project, private vs public procurement and inflation, that affect fees.
2. Addressing issues of fee disparity and barriers or challenges, including underbidding.
3. Understanding the methodology used by landscape architecture firms to establish fees.
4. Identifying how procurement strategies affect fees, such as sole-sourcing limits or RFP evaluation criteria and weights.
5. Identifying strategies to enable landscape architects to advocate for parity in fees and establishing a value proposition for the profession, with the goal of creating best practices resources for the profession and a value proposition strategy to advocate for parity in fees with procurement teams.

## Background

### About the CSLA

The Canadian Society of Landscape Architects (CSLA) is a professional organization with 2,800 landscape architect members, 615 associate (or intern) members and 669 students of landscape architecture members. The CSLA is composed of members from component organizations from across the nation. As the voice of the profession in Canada, the CSLA is an advocate for its members on issues such as nature-based solutions, urban design, urban renewal, sustainable development, human health and well-being, climate change and cultural heritage.

The CSLA delivers programs and services for its members that:

- increase public awareness and promote the profession - the CSLA communication tools include the website, the membership directory, a monthly bulletin, social media sites and LANDSCAPES|PAYSAGES, the national magazine.
- provide opportunities for professional development - the CSLA holds an Annual General Meeting and Congress, provides information year-round to members about industry and professional learning opportunities.
- recognize members and celebrate member achievements within the profession through the CSLA Awards of Excellence, the Recognition Awards Programs, the College of Fellows and by administering the Governor General's Medal in Landscape Architecture.

- support education and research through the accreditation of undergraduate and graduate landscape architecture programs, recognition of student achievement and provision of scholarships.

## CSLA's Provincial, Territorial and Regional Component Associations and LACF

The CSLA is composed of the members of nine provincial, territorial, and regional component associations who represent the profession of landscape architecture in every province and territory of Canada. In addition, as part of the fabric of the profession nationally, a charitable foundation, called Landscape Architecture Canada Foundation (LACF) was established in 1988 by members of the CSLA to invest in research, communication, and scholarship that advances our collective capacity to shape resilient, equitable and meaningful landscapes for all.

## Context of the Study

Landscape architecture is often misunderstood as simply site design or “landscaping” /planting implementation; however, landscape architects and their clients contribute to a rich body of work including early community advocacy/engagement, strategic plans and policies, political engagement, systems planning, urban design, landscape construction, and long-term site management/maintenance plans.

Since 2002, community growth throughout the country has expanded at a rapid rate and, despite an economic upheaval in 2008, demands for development approvals and construction of new homes, parks and major infrastructure has continued to grow – and landscape architectural services have grown with this change. Our leadership in many high profile and unique initiatives across Canada and internationally has highlighted the value of our skills including strategic planning, design concept formulation to technical detailing, construction management through to project completion, complex project management, engagement planning and facilitation, and interdisciplinary coordination. In the last 10 to 20 years, there have been new avenues of professional engagement tied to ecological issues, climate change and extreme weather remedial solutions, water management, universal design and climate adaptation, as well as our profession’s commitment to reconciliation with First Nations, Inuit and Metis communities.

Intensification and urban renewal efforts in large and small communities have brought a new creativity to public spaces that need refreshed programming for changing demographics, cultural needs, and artistic expression/celebration. Our urban design and landscape identity tell Canadians and visitors to our country who we are and how we care for public and private outdoor spaces.

One of the primary responsibilities of the CSLA is to advocate on behalf of its membership to the public and private sector, promote the value of professional design expertise and communicate the social, economic, and environmental contributions that landscape architects bring to an ever-modernizing community. Part of CSLA’s advocacy work includes compiling, reviewing and analyzing the compensation and fees across landscape architecture and comparing this with the fees and compensation of related professions (architecture, planning, and engineering).

## Definitions:

*Fees:* consulting fees, including hourly rates, charged to clients

## Project Description and Overview:

The goals of this study are to provide insights into the fees for a wide range of landscape architecture services and, if fees are relatively low, to provide strategies for increasing them. As such, we are inquiring as to:

- whether pay inequities exist within the design-based professions (landscape architecture, architecture, planning and engineering), taking different sectors and geographies into account through an analysis of charge-out rates / professional consulting fees.
- strategies that are used to address the wide scope of landscape architecture practice in the determination of fees, elements of which are often excluded from the scope of work in a contract.
- whether there are barriers to obtaining parity in fees in the profession; if fees are lower than those of related professions, recommendations to address the disparity among professions or different geographic regions.

This work will build on the work completed as part of the State of the Profession of Landscape Architects Report (2024), developing a more holistic understanding of the value of landscape architectural services, financial compensation for services, as well as the individual professional compensation - in comparison to allied professions.

## Work Program

1. Comparative Compensation Analysis: Review and synthesize existing fees (from fee guides and potentially other relevant sources) across landscape architecture, planning, architecture, and engineering.
2. Comparative Fee analysis
  - 2.1 Undertake a comparative review and analysis of fees in landscape architecture and the related professions. A survey of charge-out rates or other fees for landscape architecture can be established by consulting fee guides supplemented by surveying members. Fee guides are available in other professions.
  - 2.2 Supplement with member and procurement team surveys to collect current charge-out rates, pricing practices, challenges to setting fees, and methods for establishing landscape architecture fees.
3. Scope of Services Analysis:
  - 3.1 Undertake a review of the different roles and the full range of the scope of work for the various related professions to better understand how fees are calculated in project budgets. Each profession calculates 'associated' work differently, and the CSLA would like to understand how much 'associated' work, in other words, work not included in the scope, landscape architects are responsible for in comparison with other related professions. Examples of this are site planning in the preliminary stages of projects and grading design.
  - 3.2 Identify Uncompensated or Undervalued Work: Highlight roles and tasks routinely performed by landscape architects that are often excluded from standard scopes of work or not adequately compensated, to assess the extent of this issue relative to other professions.

4. Strategies to achieve parity in fees with other related professions, and geographically in Canada: Make recommendations about landscape architecture fees to achieve parity with other design-based professions, including:
  - a) investigating the merit of a national fee guideline for landscape architecture
  - b) understanding the advantages and disadvantage of various procurement and fee structures for landscape architecture, such as hourly rates or daily fees, percentage-based fees, and lump-sum fees
  - c) investigating the merit of developing a checklist of services that are or are not to be included in the scope of landscape architecture work, and how this may impact fees
  - d) communication strategies for use within the profession to promote a common understanding of the disadvantages of undercutting
  - e) communication strategies for use with client groups and allied professions to advocate for the value of landscape architecture services
  - f) business development resources for fee negotiation.

This work may need to rely on interviews or other types of research, including feedback from clients. The consultant will identify trends in salaries and fees in the landscape architecture profession and identify barriers to equitable fees and compensation in the profession.

## Deliverables

The final contract report will address each element of the work program citing sources and including the study data. A draft report will be submitted for review prior to completion of the report.

## Proposal Submission and Requirements

Consultants may price the work program (numbers 1 to 4) as a whole or separately.

Questions regarding the Terms of Reference and study can be submitted by email up to and including **April 15, 2026**.

Proposals must be received by email as a .PDF format attachment by 4pm EST, on **April 29, 2026**.

Please send submissions in electronic format, in one .pdf document, to:

Michelle Legault, CSLA Executive Director, at [executive-director@csla-aapc.ca](mailto:executive-director@csla-aapc.ca)

## Schedule and Timelines

The project will begin on the award of a contract which is expected to occur in **July or August 2026**. The project must be completed by **15 December 2026 (negotiable)**.

A detailed work plan for the base contract and schedule will be provided and approved in consultation with a CSLA Task Group to be formed for this purpose.

## Coordination

The proponent will be expected to provide, at their own initiation and undertaking, informal updates via email to the designated CSLA Executive Director throughout the project. Monthly updates will be provided, and key phase results will be presented either in person or by digital meeting format with supporting working reports documents/briefs. Final presentation will be made to the Board of Directors (representing the provincial components).

## Budget

A base project budget of **\$40 000** has been allocated for this study, with an opportunity for provisional scope to be added during the project. This includes consultant fees, expenses, meeting and survey costs, ancillary costs. The proponent is asked to list any value-added options together with the associated cost as separate items. The CSLA shall be the sole judge as to whether the added value offered in respect thereof justifies any additional expenditure. The consultant may include provisional items in their proposal for additional items that do not align with the base budget for the purposes of consideration and approval after the base contract award.

## Assumptions and Agreements

- Acceptance of the selected proponent is contingent on the successful negotiation of the conditions of this agreement, fees, and scope of service.
- The Executive Committee reserves the right to accept or reject any or all responses to this RFP, as well as to reissue the RFP.
- The Executive Committee is not responsible for any costs incurred by the applicant in preparation of this proposal.
- In case of disagreement in the interpretation of the provisions of this RFP, the final decision will rest with the Executive Committee.
- All proposal materials submitted for this RFP will remain property of the CSLA Executive Committee.
- All deliverables resulting from this RFP will remain property of the Executive Committee, and their use thereafter is at the discretion of the Executive Committee.

## Award of Contract

The selected proponent and proposal study work program will be approved by the CSLA Board of Directors. The proponent will be selected following an interview with the Task Group which shall include a discussion about fees, scope of the project and approaches to research methodology.

The association has the right to accept any proposal regardless of price, scope of work, or contents. Alternatives will be considered after the blackout period and may be clarified during addendums.

## Proposal Format + Assessment Criteria

The final project approval is at the sole and absolute discretion of the CSLA as recommended by the selection committee (the Executive Committee) and there is no basis of appeal.

The following criteria will guide the selection of the proponent. Proposals should be organized to allow the following assessment criteria to be evaluated.

Proposal Section	Section shall include:
<b>Corporate Profile / Overview of applicant (25%)</b> <b>Maximum 4 pages excluding CVs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Corporate profile</li> <li>○ Experience working with other non-profit or professional associations</li> <li>○ Evidence of strength in economic analysis and experience with the subject in similar studies</li> <li>○ Evidence of working knowledge of the landscape architectural profession and/or related professions or disciplines</li> <li>○ Evidence of ability to work bilingually</li> <li>○ CVs or resumé of the project team members (included as an appendix)</li> </ul>
<b>Relevant Project Experience (25%)</b> <b>Maximum 4 pages</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ A maximum of three (3) relevant project examples and references</li> <li>○ Project examples that demonstrate alignment with the statement of work of this RFP are recommended</li> </ul>
<b>Project Understanding + Methodology (40%)</b> <b>Maximum 6 pages</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ An outline of the approach that will be undertaken for this study, referencing your understanding of our profession and marketplace</li> <li>○ A description of how the methods of background research and analysis will inform subsequent work on this project and the final deliverable</li> <li>○ The proponent’s assessment of background documents listed in this RFP in completing the scope of work, and any other background information that may be required</li> <li>○ A discussion on the value of insights that the consulting team offers in their proposal related to objectives of the study</li> <li>○ A brief discussion on the ability to complete the project within the outlined timeline and budget restrictions</li> <li>○ Detailed proposed work plan indicating time and level of consulting effort by key task and staff resource (include in Appendix)</li> </ul>
<b>Value for Money + Overall Proposal Quality (10%)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Provide a detailed cost estimate by phase and key tasks for the project (include in Appendix)</li> <li>○ Provide a brief description of how the fees will provide maximum value for the CSLA</li> </ul>

<p><b>Max 1 page excluding detailed cost estimate</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Demonstration of the communication skills of the consulting team</li> <li>○ Demonstration of excellence through a high-quality proposal that demonstrates specificity in the proposal narrative, visuals while avoiding boilerplate text and communicating information succinctly</li> </ul>
<p><b>Supplementary /Provisional Items for Consideration</b>  <b>1-2 pages</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Identify any provisional items that the consultant may recommend for this project. This will not be part of the evaluation but will assist CSLA in understanding if additional funds may be required as the project proceeds to improve overall quality of the final project deliverables</li> </ul>

### Background Documents and potential supporting materials/data

- Other Professional Associations background studies i.e., RAIC, EC, CIP, ASLA, IFLA, UK, Australia landscape architecture associations
- CSLA Component Association Fee Guides
- Other professional fee guides (engineering, architecture, planning, etc.)