

12 Research Questions to Dig Up Information on a Contractor

Answering the questions below should give you insight into the company you are considering.

1. What does the company do and where does it do it?

- a. The Google – www.google.com – is a researcher/organizer best friend. Enter the company's name and hopefully you will find the company's website. Most companies brag about who they are, what they do, and how they do it on their website – it can be a great resource.

2. Who owns and runs the company?

- a. Check with your state's Secretary of State <http://www.coordinatedlegal.com/SecretaryOfState.html> and search for the contractor's name under the company or entity search. This search will tell you if the contractor is registered to do business in your state, the legal name and address of the company, and some information about the owners/officers of the company.
- b. The contractor website www.thebluebook.com has basic information on most construction contractors. The company itself reports the information, so be wary of the accuracy.
- c. Social media, especially www.facebook.com and www.linkedin.com (both require an account) is a great place to get information about owners and employees.

3. Does the contractor need a license to perform construction work in your state?

- a. The website <http://www.contractors-license.org/> allows you to check on the contracting requirements in your state (click on your state) and has the link to the correct place to search if your state Government requires that contractors register.

4. Has the contractor been in the news?

- a. News stories are a good source of information about owners of the company or issues the contractor may be having. Try searching www.bizjournals.com and your local newspaper's website (find the local newspaper at www.newspapers.com).

5. Does the contractor have a safety record with OSHA (Federal/State Occupational Safety and Health Administration)?

- a. Search for the contractor's name at <https://www.osha.gov/pls/imis/establishment.html>.
- b. If inspections show up, read thoroughly for information.
- c. If you need the full record of the violation, you can request it from the State/Regional office that covers your area - <https://www.osha.gov/html/RAmap.html>.

6. Has there been a fatality related to your contractor?

- a. The Laborers and other groups have put together a website to track construction worker fatalities at <http://stopconstructionfalls.com/fatality-map/fatality-mapping-project/>
- b. You can look at a map of your state to see if the contractor has had a fatality on its site, or download the data that was used to create the map to search for the contractor.
- c. OSHA's site for worker fatalities is https://www.osha.gov/dep/fatcat/dep_fatcat.html.

7. Does the company have a safety record with the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration or the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration?

- a. The FMCSA site allows you to see if the contractor/owner has registered its fleet with the Federal DOT and if its fleet (trucks, equipment, etc.) is safe. Search at <https://ai.fmcsa.dot.gov/sms/> and make sure if the company shows up that you select the 'Complete SMS Profile' for the company.
- b. The PHMSA site allows you to search and determine if the company has been involved in any safety issues involving hazardous materials – oil, natural gas, fuel, etc. Search for the company in both the 'Carrier/Reporter' field and the 'Shipper/Offeror' field. <https://hazmatonline.phmsa.dot.gov/IncidentReportsSearch/>

8. Has the contractor been debarred from doing work in your state?

- a. The site at <https://www.gsaig.gov/content/suspension-and-debarment-sites-state> allows you to search by state if the contractor has been debarred (prevented from doing work by your state). It also has links for other Federal and Local sites for debarment.

9. Has the contractor been sued or involved in a lawsuit?

- a. The website <https://www.brbpublications.com/freesites/freesites.aspx> has a list of free public records you can access by State. When you click on the state, the site will take you to a list of counties (most likely spot for suits against contractors), and then to a list of courts in the County. Many counties allow you to search for lawsuits, if not; you may want to go to the Courthouse and search there.

10. Has the contractor had wage and hour violations filed against it?

- a. The website at <http://ogesdw.dol.gov/views/search.php> allows you to search by contractor name to see if the contractor has had wage and hour claims (wage violations) filed against it. The database also checks for discrimination claims (EEOC) and will have a list of OSHA claims as well.

11. Does the contractor have a benefits program?

- a. The website <http://freeerisa.benefitspro.com> allows you to search for benefit plans the contractor may have (401K, Pension, etc.). You have to fill-in a basic registration to get access, but the site will give you access to the full filings for free.

12. Does the owner of the company or others involved with the contractor donate money to politicians?

- a. One of the ways contractors get things done is by giving donations to politicians. Search Federal political donations at <http://www.opensecrets.org/> and State and Local donations at <http://www.followthemoney.org/>. Use the 'Start Here' feature on Follow the Money, and it will walk you through searching for what you are looking for – either by company or individual (company owner).

The answers to these questions should give you a good start on figuring out if the contractor is worth doing business with. If you need further help, you can request a profile of the contractor at www.liunaresearchrequest.org (check with your Organizing Director first!)