

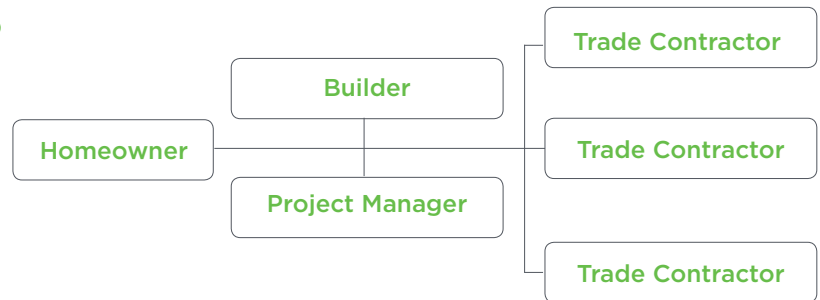
Selecting and Working with a New Home Builder

From the decision to build until the day you move in, the process of building a new home can take up to a year to complete. New home building begins with research so planning ahead is essential for a smooth construction process.

This worksheet is designed to help you identify key information and focus on the decisions ahead, giving you the power to select the right builder and prepare for a successful build.

Who's who on a building team?

Creating your new home takes a team of professionals focused on your needs. The key members of this team will work closely with each other and with you to manage construction each step of the way. Let's take a look at who does what in the building process:



Your Builder (General Contractor): Your builder and their firm's key staff will select and manage the teams of trade contractors responsible for each component or system within your home. They will also closely monitor and manage the progress and quality of your home at each step of construction.

The Construction Superintendent (Project Manager, Field Manager): Your builder will designate a key member of their staff as the overall superintendent or project manager for your new home. This person should have expertise in each phase of building your home. He/she typically has a strong background in construction science and techniques, will coordinate with other members of the overall building team, and will personally execute a series of key tasks, such as:

- Work closely with each trade contractor and building products supplier, as well as key employees of the building firm;
- Coordinate tasks such as purchasing and scheduling the delivery of building materials;
- Schedule trade contractors in sequential order as construction progresses;
- Ensure each trade contractor crew finishes their task on time and turns over a quality, completed phase of construction to the next trade contractor crew in the process. Managing these hand-offs is a key part of the building process;
- Schedule inspections, ensure quality control, and make sure everyone adheres to the building plans and specifications.

Since this person is responsible for managing the overall process to deliver a high-quality home on a schedule or timeline, it's fair to think of your construction superintendent/builder as the conductor who brings the right people, building material, processes and inspections together in a carefully planned sequence to build your new home.

Trade Contractors: Skilled contractors are responsible for building key systems and components of your new home. While the list below may not cover everyone, it includes the key trade contractors that play a major role in building every new home.

- | | | |
|--|---|-------------------------------|
| • Site preparation and grading | • Footings and foundation | • Framing |
| • Exterior siding, brickwork or stucco | • Heating, ventilation and air conditioning | • Driveways and landscaping |
| • Electrical work | • Plumbing | • Flooring |
| • Drywall | • Painting | • Interior trim and cabinetry |
| • Energy Advisor | | |

Why do I need a builder?

Hiring a builder alleviates much of the stress of building a home. Anyone who has attempted to build their own home can attest to this first-hand. For instance, bringing the utilities onto the property seems as simple as a couple of phone calls, but can lead to a number of unanswered questions, phone calls and e-mails. There can be similar challenges throughout the building process, but builders know how and where to get answers, because they do it all the time.

Another main advantage to hiring a builder is that their projects will usually take less time to complete. Larger crews can often be arranged and resources can be shared among tasks. Some parts of construction can also be done simultaneously, but managing this can be tricky. Builders usually have a roster of trade contractors that they regularly work with, and their various crews are comfortable working together on a shared jobsite. Individual trade contractors that you hire on your own will have to work you into their tight schedule, and any delays in your build could mean losing your turn with them. Builders also know what material should cost and have an ongoing relationship with suppliers.

Finding potential builders

Here are a few ways you can find builders in your area to interview:

- Check the home section and ads in your newspaper to find out which companies are building in your area, the types of homes they offer and the prices you can expect to pay.
- Ask friends, family and co-workers for names of reputable builders.
- Call or check the Nova Scotia Home Builders' Association's Website for the names of builders in your area.
- Visit the websites of builders in your community.
- Go to home shows to meet builders and to explore the latest in features and finishes.
- Visit builders' sales offices, model homes and communities.
- Check the member list of the Better Business Bureau (Atlantic chapter).

Selecting a builder

Your choice of builder will have a big impact on your building experience. It is also a key factor in your satisfaction with your home. There are a number of areas to consider:

Price: The first point of comparison is often price - how the price of one builder stacks up against those of others. Price is important, of course, but what's included in the price and what's not? Compare standard features and upgrades; the standard features offered by one builder may be an upgrade that costs extra with another. When it comes to taxes, make sure you are comparing "apples to apples". Some builders include the GST/HST in the price quoted. Others don't, and you will need to add the tax in order to compare prices effectively. As you are comparing prices, remember the old adage that you get what you pay for. Quality construction, attention to detail, the use of brand-name materials and products, and good before- and after-sales service come at a cost, so don't select a builder based on a low price alone. If you get several quotes and one is much lower than the others be very careful.

Warranty: New home warranty from an independent third party is not mandatory for construction in Nova Scotia, therefore it is important to compare builders' warranties. Do they offer a third-party warranty on their homes? If not, you could find yourself without protection if something goes wrong before, during, or after construction of your home. At the same time, not all new home warranties are the same, so you should compare different warranty programs offered by different builders. If you get several quotes and one is much lower than the others be very careful.

After-sales service: Part of the confidence of buying from a reputable builder comes from knowing that you can rely on them to provide service even after you have moved into your new home. This could mean dealing with warranty items, responding to your concerns, or just staying in touch with you to make sure you are enjoying your new home.

Rapport: Last but not least, be sure to select a company you feel comfortable with. The “personal fit” between you and your builder, or the builder’s representative, should be an important part of your decision. You may respect a builder’s credentials and appreciate the quality of their homes, or you may learn that a builder is highly valued and recommended by past customers. But these don’t automatically mean this is the right builder for you. A satisfying home building experience depends on open communication, a good working relationship and mutual trust. Consider what it would be like to build your home with each company and compare.

The key to getting information is to ask questions. Don’t worry that you are demanding too much or that some of your questions may seem obvious to others; ask about everything that is important to you. It may take several conversations to cover everything to your satisfaction where you are ready to make a decision. Don’t rush; take your time and make sure that you have a good sense of each company that you are considering, their process, customer service, and what it would be like to buy from them.

Making your final decision: Start with the Potential Builder Overview and then complete a Selection Criteria worksheet for each builder. They are designed to keep track of the builders you are considering throughout your selection process and collect the right information from each one. Compare the builders, who they are, what they offer and what they would be like to work with. Select the company that offers the best overall value and quality, and gives you the greatest sense of confidence.

Working with a builder

Once you have selected your builder, you are ready for the next step: working out the details of your new home and putting it in writing.

You should also expect the builder or staff to:

- Give you a clear explanation of the entire process – who is responsible for what, construction and payment milestones, what’s needed on closing, after-sales service and warranty.
- Give you an idea of closing costs – what’s involved and general cost ranges.
- Provide you with a detailed written contract. Before you sign a contract, ask your lawyer to review it.
- Register your build for Efficiency Nova Scotia’s New Home Construction rebates*. You may also choose to do this yourself, but either way, any applicable rebates will be paid to you, unless otherwise agreed. (If your builder will be receiving the rebates, a “Rebate to Builder” form must be signed. The final price that you pay for the home should be adjusted accordingly, based on the expected rebate.)
- Respect your request to carefully review your contract before signing.
- Appoint a contact who will always return your messages promptly and is never too busy to deal with you.
- Make arrangements for your site visits during construction.
- Give you regular progress updates.
- And of course, deliver what they promised, when they promised.

**Be sure to contact Efficiency Nova Scotia before you begin building to register for our New Home Construction program. We offer advice, guidance and financial incentives to reduce your new home’s ongoing operating costs. It is recommended to apply for this program before you receive your building permit to ensure any changes that you may wish to make from the recommendations can be made before construction starts.*

After-Sales Service

Once your home is completed, your builder should:

- Explain what you can expect the first year, and provide a schedule of contacts and check-ups.
- Schedule your follow-up assessment for Efficiency Nova Scotia’s New Home Construction program
- Contact you towards the end of your first year in the home to fix any deficiencies and complete any required repairs/touchups.

Potential Builder Overview

Builders for consideration	Short List	Finalists	Selected

Collect as much information as you can from each builder: pamphlets, brochures, builder’s packages, product literature, warranty information, etc. Read through it and create a file of everything that interests you.

	Initial Search	Builder’s Website			Internet Search Results		
#	Builder Name	Past work examples	Testimonials	No website available	# Good Reviews	# Bad Reviews	No Reviews
1		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/>
2		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/>
3		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/>
4		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/>
5		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/>
6		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/>
7		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/>
8		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/>

Quality	Builder # (from above list)							
Compare the quality of materials and the final living environment from one builder to another	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Do you have to upgrade many items to reach the level of quality you'd like?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are you comfortable with the brands used by the builder?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are the brands used by this builder under warranty?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Energy Efficiency	Builder # (from above list)							
Compare the energy efficient construction practices implemented by each builder and the results produced.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Do they register homes to be eligible for Efficiency Nova Scotia's New Home Construction rebates?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do they obtain EnerGuide Ratings on their homes?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
What are the average EnerGuide ratings their homes receive?								
What is the highest EnerGuide rating received on a home they have constructed?								
Are they an ENERGY STAR qualified builder?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Builder Selection Criteria

Complete one worksheet for each builder under consideration. Throughout your discussions, also consider how well the builder listens, if you are treated with respect, and if your questions are answered clearly and fully.

Company Name:		Phone Number:	
Contact Name:		Email:	
Office Address:			

Initial Questions

Do you provide Workman's Compensation?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	Reference Contact information:	
Do you have Liability Insurance?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	Name:	Phone:
Will you provide references?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	Name:	Phone:
Can I tour a home in progress?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	Name:	Phone:
How many years have you been in business?			
How many homes have you built?			
Can I provide my own set of plans?			
How and when can I make changes before and during construction?			
Who will oversee my home construction?			
How long will my home take to complete?			
What happens if construction falls behind schedule?			
How often will I have access to the home during the build?			
What's the process for inspection at key points in construction?			
What are the most important benefits of the homes you build?			

Reference questions	Reference 1	Reference 2	Reference 3
In general, what was the builder like to work with? Was it a good experience?			
What did you particularly appreciate about the company?			
Did you run into any problems, and if so, were the problems solved to your satisfaction?			
Was the home completed on time and on budget? If not, what were the circumstances?			
Were there missing or incomplete items at the time of possession, or items that had to be fixed?			
Were all of your colour selections, upgrades and extras done as requested?			
Is your home comfortable (temperature, drafts, air quality)?			
Would you hire this builder again?			

Price

How and when will the final price of my home be determined?			
Standard features included in price:			
Upgrade option costs & features:			
Additional charges:			
GST/HST included in price:	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	\$
GST/HST New Housing rebate included:	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	\$
Efficiency Nova Scotia rebate included:	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	\$
Building permit fees included	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	\$

Warranty

Builder has own warranty or Third party warranty

Questions to ask:	
Is the company bonded?	
Have you spoken with your mortgage broker to see if the warranty provided will affect your ability to get financing?	
What's included:	<input type="checkbox"/> ___-year warranty on workmanship and materials
	<input type="checkbox"/> Additional warranty on the building envelope against water damage
	<input type="checkbox"/> Major structural defects, up to ___ years
	<input type="checkbox"/> Deposit insurance, up to a maximum amount of \$_____
	<input type="checkbox"/> Completion insurance
	<input type="checkbox"/> Practices regarding construction delays and customer notification
	<input type="checkbox"/> Customer inspection of the home prior to taking possession
	<input type="checkbox"/> Dispute mediation between builders and customers
	<input type="checkbox"/> Guidelines for construction performance, workmanship and materials
	<input type="checkbox"/> Other:

After Sales Service	Notes
What can I expect from your company once I have moved into my new home?	
If there are items outstanding, when will they be completed?	
How would I make warranty claims?	
Who can I call if I have any questions?	
What if I have an emergency and need immediate help?	
Will you follow up with me after I move in?	
Will I have the opportunity to provide feedback on my experience?	
Do you provide newsletters or bulletins with advice and information?	

Rapport			Comments
Does the company's approach to the buying and building process work well for you?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Will you be able to work well with the people in the company?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Does the company offer the kinds of information, assistance and reassurance that you want?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Are there any restrictions with which would have difficulty?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	
Do you feel confident that they will deliver the home you want?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	