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## Econsult brings out the hired guns

Philadelphia Business Journal - by [Bernard Dagenais](#)

In a sign of the times, a powerhouse Philadelphia economics firm is loosely associating itself with a new set of well-connected consultants.

**Econsult Corp.** is preparing to announce it is working with 11 senior advisers who can bid for work with the firm's backing or be called in by the firm to help it compete for and complete jobs — even though they aren't on the payroll.

Stephen Mullin, senior vice president and principal of Econsult and a former city commerce director, sees the setup as perfectly suited for the so-called "gig economy," in which individuals with the right expertise often act more as consultants and freelancers than employees.

Among these advisers is Bernard E. Anderson, former U.S. assistant secretary of the U.S. Department of Labor and University of Pennsylvania Wharton School of Business professor, who is now out on his own. A former senior commerce official in Pennsylvania and Maryland, Daniel Gundersen, is on call. Brett Mandel, formerly with the Philadelphia Office of the Controller and a rabble-rouser for lowering city taxes as leader of the group Philadelphia Forward, is on the list. Former Commerce Bank chief economist Joel Naroff, who is now operating as Naroff Economic Advisors and has built a stellar reputation as a forecaster, also is on board.

While plenty of consultants choose to work for themselves as part of a partial retirement or quality of life decision, it's clear too that all jobs — including those at the highest level — are difficult to come by these days.

Consultants working together, or with a firm such as Econsult, improve the odds of having a pipeline of work.

Name a major economic issue in the Philadelphia region and there's a good chance that Econsult has been involved. The firm has assessed the impact of countless major sporting events. It made a case for tax breaks in the hotly debated case for the Comcast Center, which in the end had to settle for other financial incentives.

A report by the firm helped make the case in 2008 that a city-proposed inclusionary housing policy — requiring that affordable housing be part of any development — would deter construction altogether. Econsult has weighed in with reports on Philadelphia business tax reform, transit-oriented development and the fate of tax abatement program that spawned an urban residential revival.

David Crawford, firm president and a litigation expert, was senior adviser to the Mayor's Advisory Commission on Construction Industry Diversity that filed its report last year. This year, the firm helped revamp the city's minority business office.

The remaining senior advisers are:

- Joseph Fuhr, professor of economics at Widener University and an antitrust expert.
- Charles Isdell, former director of aviation for the city overseeing Philadelphia International Airport.
- Greg Byrnes, a former director of economic development for Peco Energy Co.
- Carolyn Nichols, who was deputy finance director in the city and headed the city's minority business office.
- Aqil Sabur, former president of the now closed Philadelphia Commercial Development Corp.
- G. Craig Schelter, a former city planning director and executive vice president of the Philadelphia Industrial Development Corp.
- And Sam Sherman, past president of the Building Industry Association of Philadelphia.

If all goes as planned, the arrangement will lead to more business for the advisers and Econsult, and the firm open to adding more senior advisers who have much to bring to the party.

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