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Association update: The advantages of design-build

by David Molda, Design-Build Institute of America, Guest Commentary



David Molda

Time, cost and responsibility, to name three

Design-build is the delivery method of choice for owners, whether public or private, that have an urgency or short time frame in which to design and construct their projects. In addition to the time frame issue, design-build projects are lower in overall costs and provide a single source of responsibility for design, constructability and warranty issues. The design-build delivery has been the lead-in or introductory method for Public Private Partnerships (3P) which adds the third, fourth and fifth dimensions of finance and ownership maintenance, as well as Integrated Project Delivery (IPD), where the owner takes an active role in sharing the risk for design, construction and delivery of the project.

Design-build has been cited as the return of the Master Builder concept, which at face value is true; however, Master Builders most often had all disciplines under one employment ownership. In today's marketplace, some design-builders follow that same employment scheme, while others choose to formulate teams made of designers, constructors, suppliers and specialty subcontractors — all separately owned firms — who specialize in the project type to be delivered. In both cases, the design-build team is established to offer the owner a collaboration of professional talents and experience that will provide the best value collectively in time, cost and responsibility. Other delivery methods may deliver one or two of these items, but not all three.

Shorter time frames in which to deliver projects — thereby allowing earlier generation of revenue, consolidation of numerous facility operations and immediate expansion for an overcrowded condition or safety of the public — has become a necessity in our global expansion. Design-build projects have proven time and time again to offer shorter duration in project schedules, right within our state. The design and construction of the Minnesota State Revenue Building, the Hiawatha Line light rail project, the Highway 52 expansion project, and most recently the completion of the I-35W bridge replacement, all were completed in substantially less time (months not weeks) than a design-bid-build or a "construction management at risk" delivery method.

In addition to the shorter time to complete these projects, all of these projects carry the single source responsibility on warranty issues, if there are any. Project shortcomings or discrepancies are the responsibility of the design-builder, and do not create a discussion on whether it is the fault of design or the installation, which inevitably slows down the correction of the situation for the owner.

Cost for design-build projects typically will run lower, as the collaboration between the design teams and the constructors allows for less drawing detail to implement the construction and installation. Design-build projects aid in the fast-tracking for projects, allowing phasing and thereby early starts and early finishes. Time for design and time to construct all account for personnel and resource allocations — and when there is less time, there is less cost. The federal government agencies of GSA and the Corps of Engineers, the Minnesota state agencies of MnDOT and MnSCU, various county agencies, and both large and small private sector ownership groups have found the design-build project delivery to be method of choice when time, cost and single source of responsibility are the measurements for success.

The DBIA - Upper Midwest Region is a local source for information on the design-build process. Bimonthly breakfast meetings are held on the third Wednesday of the month, with our next meeting scheduled for Jan. 20, 2010. Our second-annual Design-Build Awards Competition ceremony will be held at our March 17, 2010 meeting, with project submissions due for judging by Jan. 29, 2010. Visit our website at www.dbia-um.org for information on design-build, local events and awards applications.

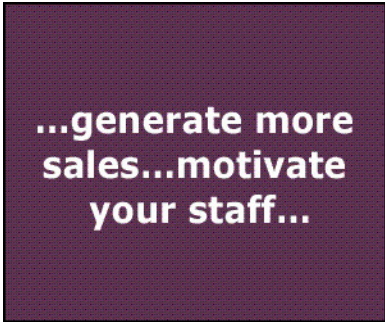
David Molda, LEED AP, is vice president for senior client management at Adolfson & Peterson Construction.

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