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Association update: Service, quality and price - Select only two

by BILL FRAZIER, Design-Build Institute of America – Upper Midwest Region, Guest Commentary

The design-build method encourages input

In almost every business environment today, consumers can choose from three value factors: service, quality and price. The dilemma is that the construction consumer can only select two.

When businesses and public entities expand and need to change their current space or infrastructure, they typically utilize either a hard-bid or design-build delivery method for construction. The two delivery methods have distinct differences.

In the hard-bid approach, the owner contracts with an architect and engineering team to design their project. The design is then issued into the public construction market to secure competitive construction bids. General contractors, along with their subcontractors, bid the work per the specifications and the lowest bid wins the contract. The primary factor in the owner's decision is initial price. Anything over and above the specified level of design, materials or service is added as a change order to the initial contract amount.

The hard-bid approach limits the use of advancements in technology of building materials and construction processes due to the low price method of delivery. Contractors will follow the specifications to deliver the designed project at the lowest possible price to the owner.

In the design-build approach, the owner holds a single contract with a design-build contractor. Both the general contractor and the architect/engineering team collaborate to design and then build the project for the owner. This process incorporates the vast experience of the contractor into project-specific design elements during the early design stages, increasing the overall value to the owner.

The design-build process encourages input from the general contractor, designers, material suppliers, and sub-contractors, drawing upon their individual areas of expertise. This streamlines the building process by introducing new technologies and processes that increase the overall sustainability, efficiency and value of the project. The design-build team approach helps shorten the building schedule, saving both time and money.



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The design-build approach generates value for the owner from project inception to completion. It is the closest delivery method to obtaining all three value factors, instead of only two.

Bill Frazier is 2010 Secretary of the Design-Build Institute of America – Upper Midwest Region, and commercial markets manager at AVR Inc.

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