

# Blueprint for managing construction projects

A successful building project — from a multistory complex to a church to a home remodel — involves many factors and players on the road to completion. A well-run project will help save money, time and unnecessary stress. As a general contractor, I suggest there are several ways to guide a successful project on all levels.

Choose the right project delivery method: There are different building methods to choose when planning a project. The three most common include design/bid/build (the most conventional), construction manager/general contractor, and design/build.

With the design/bid/build, the owner consults with design professionals to produce plans and specifications, and then the project is put out to bid. Once the owner selects a general contractor, construction begins. This approach does not engage a general contractor during the design process.

The construction manager/general contractor method varies, but usually includes choosing a general contractor before the design is complete, based on the owner's desire to obtain consulting services from the contractor prior to the start of construction.

The key component of the design/build method makes one source responsible for the project's design and construction, and usually consists of a team of construction and design professionals led by a general contractor. Owners should understand and explore the different approaches and choose the one that best meets their needs.

Develop plans: A well-designed project and a cohesive team approach will accelerate any building project, while the opposite will

engulf a project in a quagmire of questions, unnecessary paperwork, change orders and meetings. A contractor's input on cost and constructability issues early on in the process can help avoid costly, time-consuming redesigns. An experienced architectural firm will work closely with the contractor to address and overcome potential obstacles.

Formulate a budget: Careful planning around budget and design elements is essential. Accurate cost projections during design will minimize frustrations. Remember, preliminary estimates are just that, estimates and most likely will change as the designs change.

Providing accurate and realistic costs allows the general contractor, as well as subcontractors, to do their work properly and not have to try to "cut corners" to save money. During times of economic difficulty there is a temptation to cut project management and supervision budgets as cost-saving measures. This is a bad idea, as both are critical to a successful building project. Owners should account for adequate supervision and set aside funds for unexpected contingencies. Incorporate agreed upon completion schedules because the time frame for construction can affect the costs.

Select a contractor: When choosing a contractor, select one with a good reputation and

an established network of solid, reputable business connections in the community (architects, engineers, subcontractors). Look for a seasoned, trustworthy contractor who is experienced with similar types of projects.

The contractor must understand the owner's vision and work hard to help make it reality. Choose a large enough contractor to get the job done, but small enough that your project will have their full attention. The successful partnering of owners and general contractors as well as subcontractors and suppliers is paramount to the construction process.

One of a contractor's most important responsibilities is to select qualified, experienced, capable and competitive subcontractors (not always the cheapest) and to support ongoing communication between them. The best construction value is achieved with a balance of quality, price and service. Also, find a contractor with a safe building record as this can cut risk, avoid schedule delays and contain costs.

Involve the contractor: From conception, it is important for the contractor to be involved and offer input in each step of the design process. Project costs and constructability issues are largely determined in the early stages of project development — decided by the architect and the owner's interaction tempered by a contractor's knowledge of materials and processes. This team approach helps insure the job comes in on time and on budget.

Establish a communication method: A clear, direct line of communication is essential between everyone involved in a building project. From the owner to the architect to

the general contractor and subcontractors, everyone needs to openly share information. The owner's intentions need to be clearly known upfront. For example, are they planning on negotiating with a selected general contractor, but competitively bidding to subcontractors and suppliers? The contractor and the owner need to come to an agreement on the balance between budget pressure, design features and completion dates. In addition, the architect and the contractor should have a good working relationship.

Be flexible: Include time and budget contingencies to account for unexpected conditions such as building or planning department requirements/permit applications, unforeseen soil conditions and hidden variations in existing construction. Working together helps overcome obstacles. No plan can account for every possibility and everyone should be prepared for some unexpected occurrences.

Follow through: Once the cement has cured the job is far from complete. Owners need to be prompt with their punch list — a final "to do" list — which allows the contractor to quickly bring resolution to uncompleted items and pending change orders. The owner's satisfaction should be assured and warranties for completed work honored.

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**GUEST OPINION**

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