Selecting and Using an Owner Advisor in Design-Build

A Design-Build Done Right™ Primer
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A DESIGN-BUILD DONE RIGHT™ PRIMER

A DESIGN-BUILD INSTITUTE OF AMERICA PUBLICATION

This document provides guidance to Owners considering the engagement of an Owner Advisor (often referred to as Owner Representative, Owner’s Consultant, Owner’s Engineer, Owner Agent, Criteria Professional/Consultant, A/E I, and sometimes Construction Manager (CM) dependent upon the myriad of services provided, market sector and geographic location). The information provided will help with proper alignment of Owner needs and interests with the selection and work of the project team. For purposes of this primer, the term Owner Advisor will be used as an umbrella term.

An Owner Advisor is a design and/or construction consultant or consulting firm that is employed or engaged by an Owner to assist in various services. This can begin with organizing, developing and administering the selection process and for other consulting services such as review of design criteria and construction process for compliance with the RFP.

Owners may engage advisors to support the analysis and selection of a delivery method (i.e., design-build, CMAR, CM/GC, design-bid-build, etc.). Determining the optimal approach for a specific Owner and project requires a broad understanding of various delivery methods and a commitment to a balanced evaluation of the pros and cons around conventional delivery versus collaborative methodologies. Once a selection is made, an Owner Advisor’s scope and role will be defined accordingly.

This document assumes that the Owner has selected design-build as the project delivery method. However, in instances where an Owner is uncertain about the project delivery method that is right for the project, the role of the Owner Advisor may include closing the knowledge gap to include development of an “Acquisition Strategy,” through an evaluation of project delivery methods and risk assessments.

Determining the project delivery method is one of the most important decisions made by every Owner embarking on a construction project. Project drivers have fundamental impacts on the delivery method selected. These drivers include budget and schedule requirements, a responsive and quality design and construction process, a risk assessment with allocation of risks to the appropriate parties and recognition of the level of expertise and resources within the Owner organization. In addition to these project drivers, delivery method selection can also be driven by other Owner considerations. These considerations may include a desire to create a more collaborative and innovative project environment, recognition of the benefits of engaging construction expertise early in design, the need for early recognition of cost and the ability to select the builder using criteria other than low price. (More on this topic can be found in the “Scope of Services” section.)
Understanding that each Owner — and each project — is unique, this document contains broad, overarching principles that every Owner should consider in the selection of an Owner Advisor. As noted above, the level of expertise within the Owner organization is a driving factor, as is an organizational culture that supports the collaboration and teamwork that epitomizes integration and cohesion among team members.

The Owner Advisor should serve as an extension of the Owner’s staff, including a “One Team — One Goal” mentality that is essential to project and team success.

For ease of reference this document is organized into five (5) sections:

**BACKGROUND**
An overview of how the role of the Owner Advisor has evolved over time and how it differs in design-build project delivery

**OWNER ADVISOR QUALIFICATIONS**
An overview of the appropriate mix of technical and soft skills required of Owner Advisors working in an integrated design-build environment

**SCOPE OF SERVICES**
An overview of the array of Owner Advisor services for consideration to assist in understanding the full scope of services provided by Owner Advisors and to help Owners be prepared to clearly convey the services most important to the individual project needs

**TERMINOLOGY**
Descriptions of various terms used in the industry to help Owners understand the many varieties of Owner Advisors and the wide array of terminology used to describe each; a word about “bridging”; and an overview of the flexibility of design-build project delivery

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**
Available to supplement the information in this primer.

DBIA understands and expects that many users of design-build will want further explanation and guidance to supplement this general guidance document. Given this, DBIA intends to continually update its portfolio of publications, tools and resources to provide design-build stakeholders with access to leading-edge information so that Owners are equipped to choose the right Owner Advisor for their needs.

**Background**
The role of an Owner Advisor has developed over the years as the increasing complexities of contractual obligations have led Owners to seek more advice in order to be more informed and knowledgeable about the procurement, design and construction processes. In the last few decades, the Owner Advisor role has been filled to some degree by the Construction Management (CM) or Project Management (PM) role, as well as by various design professionals. However, the role has largely developed within the traditional design-bid-build project delivery model in which the designer and general contractor have no direct contractual relationship, making full collaboration between the parties difficult. Collaboration and the “One Team — One Goal” mentality are essential ingredients for an Owner Design-Build Advisor’s success, as well as for successful project outcomes.

With design-build increasingly becoming a project delivery method of choice, we see Owners at two ends of a very broad spectrum. On one end Owners may be hesitant to make the transition to design-build because they lack essential knowledge and/or access to professionals, either in-house or on a consulting basis, to help successfully guide them. At the other end of the spectrum are more experienced Owners delivering more complex projects. The latter traditionally have a better
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Understanding of the design-build process and may desire to seek assistance to provide furtherance of Design-Build Done Right™ best practices for proper alignment of the Owner’s needs and interests with the work of the design-build team. This includes fostering open communication, working collaboratively as a team and conflict avoidance/resolution.

In the context of design-build, the spectrum of experience for an Owner Advisor is wider than in traditional project delivery. This is, in many ways, a testament to the success of design-build. With its expanded use, the knowledge gap for an Owner Advisor in a design-build environment must be narrowed.

For example, there is great variance in the application of best practices in the procurement process, emphasizing the need for qualified Owner Advisors. Underlying challenges include uncertainty by many Owners as to how to prepare the performance requirements and substantiation metrics necessary to optimize the many advantages of design-build. Additionally, the many variations of design-build make it imperative that Owner Advisors understand fundamental principles and best practices relative to all aspects of procurement from both an Owner’s perspective and the perspective of the design-builder.

Based on the varying Owner needs and the wide-ranging expertise of industry practitioners and Owner Advisors, it can be difficult for an Owner to understand and prioritize needed services. Inconsistent terminology and varied skillsets among Owner Advisors add to the uncertainty.

The remainder of this document will address these issues and provide guidance for industry to both help Owners select the right Advisor for their needs, and to help Advisors be prepared with the appropriate skillset and mindset to provide optimal value to Owners.

Owner Advisor Qualifications

Equally important to determining the right scope of services is selecting the right Owner Advisor. Owners must engage advisors with the appropriate mix of leadership, technical and facilitative skills necessary to be successful in their project.
LEADERSHIP SKILLS

Leadership skills are an essential component in positioning the Owner Advisor to make thoughtful decisions about how to create a team environment conducive to achieving the project goals. Among the most valuable leadership skills are the ability to delegate, inspire and communicate effectively, as well as the ability to:

— Establish a vision and motivate others
— Identify, manage and foster healthy and collaborative relationships
— Recognize one’s own emotions and that of others, and use emotional information to guide thinking and behavior, as well as manage and/or adjust emotions to adapt to environments or to achieve the project goals (i.e., high emotional intelligence)
— Create an environment of trust and collaboration characterized by the ability to create program/project alliance and build a common purpose
— Guide a facilitative formal partner approach to identify and resolve issues
— Help the Owner promote and build one team (One Team — One Goal), including laying the groundwork by developing the processes to achieve this
— Guide and create consensus with all the stakeholders (internal and external) on the project definition, intent, design, cost and schedule
— Represent the program/project and its goal to all the parties
— Formulate and maintain an integrated and cohesive team
— Recognize and address any potential conflicts of interest
— Carry out duties with integrity and character, recognizing that Owner Advisors may be required to function in multiple roles

— The Owner Advisor must have proven experience that includes an in-depth understanding and knowledge of:
  
  • Required policies, processes and procedures in support of all procurement methodologies, including Local, State and Federal requirements
  • Appropriate risk allocation and management
  • In-depth knowledge of different program/project delivery methodology such as:
    — Program Control Systems, including the ability to tailor and implement comprehensive program control and reporting systems which includes, but is not limited to: cost estimating; program/project scheduling; cash flow and accrual projections; earned-value analysis; progress reporting systems; schedule loaded manpower breakdown structure and manpower requirement forecasting; and high-level reporting system for the executives, the boards, public, etc.
    — Project management information systems, technology and tools (i.e., BIM)
    — Procurement processes, including the ability to assist the Owner with selecting the right team, as well as RFQ, RFP and agreement template development in accordance with permissible procurement statutes/regulations
    — Qualifications-based (QBS) and best value (BVS) selection processes
  
  — Strong capability for design, project cost and schedule review to include:
    • Ability to assist in assuring design submissions meet the intent of the RFP
    • Confirming that any agreed-upon enhancements and/or deviations are consistent with the contract requirements
    • Independent cost estimation skills
  
  — Working knowledge and keen awareness of:
    • Market conditions and practices to promote a competitive field (in-depth knowledge of commodities availability and cost escalation factors, i.e. availability of key trade contractors and skilled labor)
    • Design and construction industry standards applicable to the project

TECHNICAL SKILLS

Owners should carefully consider the Owner Advisor’s key employees’ educational background and experience, including a review of licenses and credentials that support a commitment to effective project delivery and lifelong learning. Ideally, the selected Owner Advisor will assign employees who hold appropriate certifications (such as DBIA®, Assoc. DBIA®, CCM, PMP) and/or licenses (such as Registered Architect, Professional Engineer, etc.).
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- Applicable industry and building codes, including ADA compliance, where applicable
- Environmental restrictions and concerns
- Impact of 3rd party stakeholders (regulatory agencies, utility companies, municipalities, etc.) and Owner risk mitigation strategies
- Market sector specific requirements, as applicable (i.e., in transportation, familiarity with NEPA, NPDES permitting, right-of-way acquisition, etc.)
- Risk allocation and management
- Innovation as an outcome of effective design-build, and the innovative use of best practices to meet Owner’s needs
- Sureties and bonding

**Facilitative Skills**

Facilitative skills combined with leadership skills result in a “Facilitative Leader.” Among the most critical facilitative skills for an Owner Advisor are the ability to:

— Use active listening skills, including paraphrasing, summarizing, reflecting, and questioning
— Encourage and generate participative discussion in groups
— Stimulate creative thinking through brainstorming/other idea-generation processes
— Stimulate strategic consideration of alternatives and informed decision-making of appropriate choices
— Manage contrasting perspectives
— Lead/design inclusive group processes that honor different learning styles
— Help shape more powerful and strategic questions for exploration

With honed facilitative skills the Owner Advisor will have the ability to guide and facilitate:

— Teambuilding and alignment of Owner’s objectives and expectations
— Procurement process
— Agency reviews (zoning, Fire Marshal, building permits, EPA, local storm water requirements, State funding agencies, State natural resource agencies, State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), regulated and contaminated waste regulations, etc.)
— Design and construction execution
— Project closeout processes

**Other Important Skills & Knowledge**

— Commitment to put the project first
— Integrated project delivery skills including design-build, construction, estimating, architectural, engineering, MEP or other discipline design (of specific building type — vertical, horizontal, water, WWTP, etc.)
— Stakeholder facilitation
— Environmental impact process, site selection and evaluation
— Familiarity with local and targeted worker hiring programs

The combination of the skillsets above provides the foundation for Owner Advisor success. However, Owners should supplement these services with financial and legal advisory services, as needed, based on the Owner and project needs.

**Scope of Services**

A key to successful projects is a well-conceived process that allows Owners to evaluate their choices and to select the best design and delivery approaches through the filter of carefully and intelligently prepared evaluation criteria that include the Owner’s project objectives, expectations and design, construction and other project challenges.

Owners must conduct a proactive and balanced assessment of the unique characteristics of its program/project and its organization before deciding to use design-build. In some instances, Owners do not have the internal capacity, experience and/or expertise to conduct such an assessment and will rely on the Owner Advisor for guidance.

The Owner Advisor should serve as an extension of the Owner’s staff, without any material, perceived or actual conflict of interest (that has not been disclosed and waived), equipped to guide the process of assessing project delivery methods, as well as advising the Owner and acting as a single point of contact for all members of the project team after project delivery selection. This allows the Owner to focus on its core business, knowing that its interests are addressed throughout the course of the project. The Owner Advisor must work to align the entire integrated project team with the Owner’s priorities throughout the course of the project.

1 Refer to Section 3 of the DBIA Code of Professional Conduct, Conflicts of Interest. See also 23 CFR § 636.116 and other applicable federal, state or local regulations dealing with conflicts of interest for Owner Advisors.
An Owner Advisor must be prepared to help the Owner develop a scope of services designed specifically to meet the Owner’s needs and to equitably manage project risk. These services may include program development, management, RFP, criteria development, design and construction administration, procurement of equipment and services, long-term maintenance and lifecycle cost considerations, community awareness, commissioning and other applicable support functions and services. The Owner Advisor must work with the Owner to customize services to most effectively match the project’s requirements and the Owner’s needs, allowing “Scope of Services” to be tailored to provide only those services that are necessary to supplement the Owner’s existing project staff.

In general, Owner Advisor services may include various tasks and can be categorized into the following four (4) areas. Keep in mind that the role of an Owner Advisor is not a linear process, so there may be overlap among the areas:

**CLOSING THE OWNER’S KNOWLEDGE GAP**
- Development of an “Acquisition Strategy”
- Confirming what is permitted under statute and policy
- Providing education and orientation for the Owner

**PRE-AWARD SUPPORT — PHASE ONE**
- Defining project objectives and priorities
- Developing/confirming project scope of work and other requirements including project quality approach
- Assisting in determining project goals, challenges and constraints
- Managing Owner expectations
- Developing procurement plan, schedule and procedures

- Emphasizing the importance of collaboration, timely decision-making and the designation of the Owner’s decision-maker
- Defining how regulatory approvals intersect with delivery method selection
- Explaining project delivery evaluation and selection options/procedures
- Facilitating project risk assessment and management strategy sessions
- Market validation of and comment on the proposed delivery method
- Supporting budget development
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— Assisting in development of a realistic budget for the proposed scope of work
— Discussing contract forms, terms and conditions and special provisions
— RFQ development
— Competition process meetings, inquiries and addenda;
— Facilitating interviews, where applicable
— Establishing qualifications selection criteria and methodology
— Support determination of shortlisting the most highly qualified submissions

PRE-AWARD SUPPORT — PHASE TWO
— Developing and/or peer reviewing design criteria documents, performance requirements and limited preliminary design (bridging document) development (see page 10 for more on “bridging”)
— Gathering data (e.g., site, existing facilities, demolition and regulatory requirements) and determining appropriate right to rely on this data
— Providing cost validation
— RFP development
— Establishing value-based selection criteria and methodology and stipends
— Facilitating proprietary one-on-one meetings with shortlisted proposers
— Conducting risk and opportunity assignment
— Assisting with Incentive/award fee development
— Providing guidance/expertise in estimating/negotiating the GMP
— Providing contract negotiation support to optimize opportunity for the Owner to select the best design-build team with the best proposal, within budget
— Performing Contract Administration including:
  • Defining acceptance/performance testing
  • Defining project training
  • Defining turnover processes.

POST-AWARD SUPPORT
— Engaging formal Partnering Program development and implementation
— Developing and implementing project execution planning
— Cost monitoring

— Facilitating project meetings and progress reviews
— Providing or monitoring project construction quality support
— Minimizing project disputes and providing proactive claims avoidance initiatives
— Project completion/closeout support
— Supporting incentive/award fee program
— Acceptance/performance testing
— Training
— Turnover to the Owner

Regardless of the services utilized, Owner Advisors must act as facilitators, building collaborative teams and alignment leading to optimizing the value inherent in design-build. The role of the Owner Advisor is critical to the success of projects. When performed effectively, Owner Advisor services can create great value for the project and the team, carrying the “One Team – One Goal” philosophy through project completion. Conversely, when such services are not performed effectively, value can be significantly diminished and desired project outcomes undermined.

Terminology

There are numerous terms used in the AEC industry to describe professionals that provide consulting services to Owners. The terminology used varies depending on the type of services provided and, in some instances, the geographic region of the country. The more commonly used terms are listed below, including the most consistently used definition of each.

Without consistent understanding of terminology, titles may be misused, expertise may be misrepresented, information may be misunderstood, and failure can result. DBIA will continually update and refine terminology used to describe an Owner Advisor. The list below includes key terms regardless of the type of services sought or geography.

A/E 1
Also referred to as the “Criteria Consultant,” this architect or engineer individual(s) or organization(s) works with the Owner’s project team and other stakeholders in development of the program and to create the performance-based requirements document and the Phase Two RFP. A/E 1 should not refer to the Designer of Record.
CONSTRUCTION MANAGER (CM)

A Construction Manager (CM) skillfully collaborates with and provides oversight to the Owner, the architect, the general contractor, trade contractors and/or subcontractors to deliver the project on time, at or under budget, and to the Owner’s expected standard of quality. Professional CMs provide services that differ from general contractors or constructors. They typically do not perform the actual construction tasks themselves, but either act as advisors directly to the Owner overseeing construction contracts or operate “at risk”, being contractually obligated for delivering the entire project. Either way, a CM is charged with ensuring the project progresses smoothly and achieves the Owner’s business objectives. The CM often leads a team of specialists. These specialists oversee different aspects of the project including: scheduling, safety, cost estimating, design, quality assurance, value engineering, commissioning, construction inspection, risk management, and more. Most CMs have backgrounds in civil engineering, and many are contractors or architects.

CRITERIA CONSULTANT (OR CRITERIA PROFESSIONAL)

A registered architect or engineer individual or entity responsible for developing and/or affirming the program and performance criteria, specifications and technical standards (often collectively referred to as a “design criteria package”) on behalf of an Owner that is implementing a project. A Criteria Professional may be a member of an Owner’s organization or be designated from an outside entity such as a professional services firm. A Criteria Professional may be designated on a stand-alone basis or may serve simultaneously in any of the more broadly defined Owner advisory capacities (in other words, an Owner Advisor or Owner Representative may be simultaneously designated as a “Criteria Professional”). Specific State statutes often require the designation of a Criteria Professional (or similar term) for a design-build project and statutory definitions for this role may differ in their specific requirements.

OWNER’S AGENT

An Owner’s Agent is a third party designated to represent an Owner during a project’s definition, procurement and execution. As an agent of an Owner, the Owner’s Agent can be an authorized representative for the issuance of information, solicitation documents, project requirements, contracts and directives through the lifecycle of a project. In some cases, this authority may formally extend to a Power of Attorney on behalf of an Owner but is typically implemented as authorized
representation of the Owner for the administration of a procurement and the resulting project administration. An Owner’s Agent may be designated on a stand-alone basis or may serve simultaneously in any of the more broadly defined owner advisory capacities (in other words, an Owner Advisor or Owner Representative may be simultaneously designated as an “Owner’s Agent”).

OWNER’S ENGINEER
An independent representative of the Owner on a construction or engineering project, most often in the energy, petroleum or manufacturing/industrial sectors where project delivery is Engineer/Procure/Construct (or “EPC”), a form of design-build. The Owner’s Engineer may assist in site selection, technology assessment/selection, assistance in procurement of equipment, contract negotiation support, project execution plan, project scheduling, project risk assessment and risk mitigation plans, as well as contract administration of the EPC contract.

OWNER’S CONSULTANT (OR OWNER’S ENGINEER)
An Owner’s Consultant is a third party (individual or professional services firm) responsible for supporting an Owner’s implementation of a project. Owner’s Consultant services may include any combination of support throughout the project development, procurement, and delivery lifecycle. For example, Owner’s Consultant services may include support for evaluation and selection of a procurement and delivery model; project planning and strategy; project definition and specification; preliminary design, sometimes referred to as “bridging documents” (see next section for additional information); procurement document development and procurement process support; support for evaluation of submittals and selection of preferred submittals; negotiations; and continued support of design reviews and validation, construction monitoring and management, commissioning and startup, warranty period support and operations. The Owner’s Consultant role may be limited to procurement and administrative functions, but often includes technical architectural and engineering support that requires professional registration.

Owners in aligning their organizations for successful design-build project delivery. Owner’s Consultants may simultaneously serve an Owner as a “Criteria Professional” (particularly where State statute requires such designation).

OWNER REPRESENTATIVE
There is minimal distinction between an Owner Representative and Owner Advisor. However, an Owner Representative may represent or otherwise stand in place of the Owner for decision-making purposes, but without the ability to act on behalf of the Owner as an Owner’s Agent. A third party providing advisory services is more likely to be designated as an Owner Representative (versus an Owner Advisor) when it is the primary face of a project to the design-build community, usually when the Owner’s own representation or resources are limited.

Except for Owner’s Agent, the individuals/entities above generally do not hold a contractual commitment for project performance and do not act on the Owner’s behalf unless also designated as an Owner’s Agent. While each may provide broad support for contracting strategies, they do not provide legal advice or counsel (although some do work closely in parallel with an Owner’s internal or third-party legal counsel). Similarly, each may provide general support for financial and insurance requirements and standards but do not generally perform financial advisory functions and are not typically also a designated Financial Advisor, particularly where performance of these service requires formal licensing or registration.

A Word about “Bridging”
One of an Owner’s initial decisions in the procurement of a project is the level of prescriptive requirements to include in its design criteria. Prescriptive requirements define a predetermined design solution, as opposed to a performance requirement, which provides the Owner’s desired end-result. The process known as “bridging” is when an Owner, prior to selection of a design-builder, provides substantial prescriptive requirements amounting to a preliminary design, often consisting of outline specifications and some minimal level of design.

Successful design-build procurements (in accordance with DBIA Best Practices) utilize well-written performance requirements that establish the project goals, challenges and constraints, rather than provide the one and only design solution. While many Owners choose to use “bridging documents,” and some
public laws require the use of such procedures, the use of extensive prescriptive specifications and preliminary design eliminates many of the advantages inherent in design-build project delivery, as outlined below.

— A primary advantage of design-build delivery is the potential to produce optimum value through fully integrated, team-based creativity and innovation. With bridging, early involvement of the design-builder in the design process is foreclosed because key solutions and concepts are determined before the design-build team begins its design efforts.

— Bridging detracts from the Owner’s ability to obtain innovative and divergent solutions derived from the design-build procurement process.

— With prescriptive requirements, the risk could shift back to the Owner under the Spearin Doctrine for problems associated with the prescriptive requirement. Therefore, the primary advantage of single point of responsibility is diminished. Owners who use prescriptive requirements need to be very careful regarding Spearin Doctrine impacts to the Owner to the extent that design information is provided to a design-build contractor.

— The amount of time that the Owner uses to develop the bridging documents could be better utilized by the design-build team to understand the Owner’s objectives, consider alternative solutions and/or potentially procure long lead items, thereby expediting the delivery of the project.

— Extensive bridging documents are time-consuming and expensive to produce for the Owner, and there is often substantial effort by the second design team that duplicates the work of the first design team.

The Owner’s decision with respect to the amount of prescriptive content and bridging in the criteria documents must be made in conjunction with other procurement decisions. DBIA believes that well-crafted performance requirements with limited prescriptive specs are necessary to optimize the use of design-build.

Many Owners do not have the internal capacity and/or expertise to provide strategic acquisition planning and project oversight independently. For these Owners, finding the right Owner Advisor is essential to project and team success. The guidance provided in this document should prove useful to both Owners who will engage Owner Advisors, and Advisors who should be aware of what skills and resources they should bring to the table.

**Additional Resources**

DBIA has many resources to help reinforce and support the content of this primer. Among the most popular are:

**Primers and Documents**

— DBIA Universally Applicable Best Practices (and additional sector-specific best practices)
— Choosing a Project Delivery Method
— DBIA Code of Professional Conduct
— DBIA Manual of Practice

**Standard Forms/Agreements**

— DBIA Form 400 — Standard Form Request for Qualifications, Standard Form Request for Proposals, and RFQ/RFP Guide
— DBIA Form 501 — Standard Form of Contract for Design-Build Consultant Services

**Education Courses**

— Principles of Design-Build Delivery and Procurement
— Design-Build Contracts and Risk Management
— Post-Award: Executing the Delivery of Design-Build Projects
— Developing an Acquisition Strategy in Design-Build
— Design Management Fundamentals

For more information or to review other resources, visit dbia.org
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A special thanks is extended to DBIA’s Owner Advisors Task Force

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