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Preconstruction management: independent consultant

The culture within the construction industry, and of many clients, is an environment of expediency. The inevitable result is a tendency to rush the preconstruction stages of project development and to diminish or eliminate any benefits of a properly performed and managed preconstruction process.

Preconstruction management, as I define it, is the implementation, facilitation, scheduling, supervision, quality control and analysis of preconstruction services performed on a project.

Preconstruction management can easily be compared with project management. Just as a project manager oversees and is responsible for all of the individual trades performed during construction, a preconstruction manager oversees and is responsible for all of the individual tasks performed during the preconstruction process.

The seven knowledgeable areas of preconstruction management are: scope management, time management, cost management, quality management, resource management, communications management and integration management.

■ **The traditional project team.** In the traditional project team structure, each preconstruction team member reports directly to the client, with little or no communication between team members. As a result, team members may interpret the wants and needs of the client differently. This leads to friction between team members who are seemingly acting on the behalf of the client. The only outcome of such an environment is a constant "back and forth" between the team members with no real progress, solutions or innovation. The end result is a poor design, a busted



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budget and diminished value to the client.

In order to properly manage the diverse and complex tasks undertaken during pre-construction, we must decide which team member is best suited to act as the

PCM.

■ **The client.** A client's most significant project risk factor is undertaking a project with meager levels of project scope definition and a lack of properly managed preconstruction services. Clients are faced with a tremendous amount of risk on every project. In the current days of economic uncertainty, risk mitigation is of paramount importance to clients and their investors.

Being able to take everything only at face value leaves a client without solutions and an inability to properly reassess project objectives. The consequences of performing in the role of PCM without the knowledge and experience required to analyze the information presented through preconstruction services is wasted time and client resources.

■ **The architect.** An architect's primary objective and focus is on providing the client with the best, most efficient design possible that meets all of the client's functional requirements. Architects must process all of the client's wants and needs into functional and effective design solutions, which is not always possible. While trying to manage the client's requirements, architects are reluctant to add the additional constraint of

cost to what may already seem like an endless list of constraints. However, cost always is of paramount importance to a client.

The two primary concepts in the development process are cost and value. It is, therefore, important that these two issues are of major importance in the design stage as well. A balance between these two important concepts must be achieved for the preconstruction process to have succeeded. It is vital that we implement the best systems and methods available to ensure that the client and the preconstruction team are served by the best information and decisions we can secure for this most important early stage. Architects should not bear this responsibility alone.

■ **The CM/GC.** The construction manager/general contractor is by far the most qualified preconstruction team member to perform and manage the preconstruction process. There are, however, several limitations to the successful completion of the preconstruction process of which not many clients are aware.

1. Pricing accuracy. The CM/GC must come to cost conclusions based upon his historical data and specific experiences. This cost basis also must be checked by a third party to confirm or question the budgetary conclusions. This ensures the quality and accuracy of the service and enhances the information for various uses by the client.

2. Prior experiences. The prior experiences of the general contractor with certain construction materials, methods and systems may bear weight on various design decisions. Independent insight on the advantages and disadvantages of materials, methods and systems must be obtained and a commitment made to making decisions with

the client's best interests in mind and not on what's easiest for the CM/GC.

3. Conflict of interest. The inevitable result of a competing general contractor performing preconstruction services to a client is a conflict of interest. The company's interests must come before the client and very rarely are those interests the same.

■ **The independent cost consultant.** Clients need independent advisers who are willing to challenge the status quo; who can tell them when they have a problem because they have the wrong team; and who will challenge what the project is costing to get better value for the money.

The independent cost consultant is most qualified and able to maintain a fair and balanced decision making process that remains unbiased toward any particular team member and only represents the best interests of the client. This also will assure all team members that their preconstruction efforts are not wasted by the lack of effort of any other team members.

■ **Conclusions.** Few clients are willing to put in place anything that might interfere with profit potential. Even fewer are willing to allocate budget dollars on something that may only offer a theoretical return on investment. Some would argue that preconstruction management only adds another layer of front-end cost to an already tight preconstruction budget. But preconstruction management is not about adding cost. It's about ensuring that the front-end costs incurred are offering the most value possible to the client. It's about minimizing and monitoring the most significant risk factor on a project: poor preconstruction planning.▲