



The owner's representative: A justified expense for your next project? A look at the qualifications

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In my years as a construction professional I have worked in many positions, wearing many different hats, but none as challenging as that of an owners representative (OR). Some of the qualifications that come to mind are the following.

1. Years of experience in the field building similar projects.
2. An extensive understanding of the construction process and how to coordinate a project team.
3. Knowledge to interpret construction drawings and details. The ability to take what's on paper, build it in your mind and identify the potential problems before construction starts. It's a lot easier to change a line on a drawing than concrete or steel in the field.

The typical construction project involves the following steps:

1. Determine the project scope of work.
2. Identify potential design firms. Obtain qualifications and/or proposals from these firms. Interview and select the design firm. Diligence must be given in this process; you want to insure the design team has the proper background and experience in your type of project. Get the design firm to commit specific personnel to your project so you understand who will be working on the project.
3. Further develop the scope of work. Review and check the plans at each stage of schematics, design development, and construction documents to insure the project intent is carried through and constructability issues are addressed.
4. Decide on the type of construction contract: Lump sum or GMP. The designer and/or contractor puts together bid packages-this is another good opportunity for a constructability review.
5. The contractor creates a base line schedule in conformance with the time constraints in the contract. It is important to conduct a diligent review of this schedule to insure the owner is properly protected.
6. As the project progresses, quality assurance inspections are required to insure the construction is being carried out in accordance with the contract documents. While the AE may be involved in this process, typically an impartial third party can provide effective inspection.
7. An independent third party or in-house staff needs to insure all of the proper paperwork is in place (insurance certificates, etc.) and resolve the inevitable questions that arise (RFIs) and the contract changes that require negotiations, if the project site is occupied, constant coordination with the residents is required to keep the peace during construction.
9. At each step, the question should be posed if your in-house organization has the time and expertise to effectively manage that particular event. With a positive answer, drive on with your staff. If you identify a shortfall with your in-house staff, a construction consultant should be considered. By insuring that you have the right professionals on the project at any given phase, you are essentially taking out an insurance policy. The right team will go a long way toward insuring that your project

will get built on time, within budget and at the quality level you expect.

Do I try to manage this project in-house or use an outside consulting firm? It depends.

FAI's business model approach is one that is the core of our company values. We treat every client like they are our only client. FAI feels in reality most people want personal service. We are honest and open with all our clients. FAI can tailor project management to the client's requirements and to fit their budget which is important in this age of sky rocketing construction costs. We service clients in hospitality, retail, and commercial in both private and public sector business environment. FAI implements project controls from day one starting right at the design development right thru construction and owner occupancy. From our prospective, we can see early if the project is set up to have inherent scheduling delays, cost overruns or change orders.

The key to a successful project is establishing clear expectations between the owner and its contractor right off the bat. Our role is to partner with the contractor to help everyone to realize their goals on the project. The earlier we're brought in, the better.

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