



# nerej

## **A construction program manager brings added value and advocacy to your project team**

January 27, 2010 - Spotlights

Once reserved for complex, large-scale capital construction programs, the role of a construction program manager (PM) has moved into the industry's mainstream and proven its value as an integral part of the team on virtually any size project. Given the inherent risks of building, particularly in today's economic climate, a PM will advocate exclusively for the project owner or developer and provide a level of experience and supply resources which may not exist within the project owner's organization. As a fee-based service, the PM has no conflicting interest in any other part of the project thereby allowing it to be responsible solely to the owner.

From simply augmenting a client's staff by filling special gaps and needs in their development team to "concept through completion" services, a PM will provide a specific, comprehensive solution that fulfills the project's requirements.

While staff augmentation, specific consulting assignments and being hired to "troubleshoot" are all part of a seasoned PM's forte, real value and cost savings are realized when engaged at the inception of a project.

Planning is everything. If bringing a project in "ahead of schedule" and "under budget" are truly two of the more prominent benchmarks by which we measure the success or failure of a construction project, then the establishment and maintenance of budgets, schedules and other project controls must take place as early as practical.

To arrive at a point where useful budgets and preliminary project schedules can be generated, the list of critical items that need attention during the planning process can be daunting to even the most seasoned developer. Space programming, concept drawings, site selection, planning and zoning requirements, coordination and communication with local officials, environmental studies and approvals, funding, project delivery methods, design consultant and contractor/CM vetting and selection, implementing project controls and best practices - this is just a sampling of the particulars required which are necessary for a successful project launch.

A project manager will facilitate a high level of collaboration between all members of the project team (particularly the contractor/CM and architect) by establishing information-sharing and communication protocols that will be implemented during each phase of the project.

During the life cycle of a construction project, an abundance of documents are created and distributed to a plethora (typically) of entities. Having a comprehensive plan for document management and control will undoubtedly save the owner money - one mishandled file or document could have far-reaching scheduling, design, cost or claim implications. While technology has helped make us more productive, it has become far too easy to fire off electronic communications, attachments, files and possibly sensitive information to unintended recipients.

While on the topic of construction documents, one point should never be lost - the greatest set of

plans produced by the best architect, being executed by the most savvy CM or contractor all while utilizing the best technology available - will generate changes. No question about it. Implementing Building Information Modeling and other protocols will help minimize changes, related delays and associated costs. During the design and construction phases and working primarily with the architect and construction manager / general contractor, the PM will have an active leadership role in containing costs and maintaining the project budget, reviewing design documents to maintain the Owner's design intent, reviewing and addressing changes, maintaining the project schedule and related milestones, conducting regular site inspections, scheduling and holding project meetings and proper documentation of the same.

We also live in a time where construction industry profit margins continue to shrink and in a world which becomes more litigious by the day. Even where far and away, the vast majority of design and construction firms are highly trustworthy and most certainly great stewards for their respective market segments - they still need to watch out for their bottom line first and foremost. Having a PM at the helm to help mitigate claims and manage/analyze risks is not only a valuable asset to the owner, but can be a welcome "neutral" party in resolving disputes between other members of the project team.

Lastly, a qualified PM will seamlessly and quickly integrate with a client's organization and its various stakeholders. These areas and related associates may include information technology, data/telecommunications, facilities and required department/division/project leaders, just to mention a few. Achieving an understanding of an owner's critical vendor relations, or assisting the client in establishing new vendor relations is also of paramount importance. This may include computer and data infrastructure, telephone systems, security systems, office and systems furniture, furnishings, moving and other areas of significance that can impact the project schedule.

As one might surmise from the above, the benefits provided by engaging a construction program manager are no longer exclusive to large-scale, multi-site capital projects, but can be extremely beneficial and cost effective on a project of any size - including your next one.

Roland Martin is president of Martin Construction Advisors, Manchester, NH.

New England Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540