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The owner's project manager (OPM)

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The role of an owner's project manager (OPM) is becoming more popular for owners who are building new spaces and buildings or renovating their existing spaces. An owner could be a downtown tenant in a commercial office building, a bank looking to add branch locations, a homeowner or any entity with a need for a building project. Twenty years ago most projects were managed directly by the owner who would either have the expertise to perform the project management function, would have someone in the firm who had the expertise or would rely heavily on the architect and/or builder to manage the process for them. Today, most owners either have in house project managers or facilities professionals, are transitioned to a project manager from their real estate broker or hire their own outside professional to manage their project. The OPM is responsible for understanding the owners' needs relative to cost, schedule and quality then the OPM facilitates the engagement of an architect and contractor to complete the three legged stool representing the project team: owner, architect and contractor.

Today's OPM's come in all shapes and sizes. Some are former architects, engineers or contractors; some have no experience in the construction field and are none of the above. Some come from large firms, some from small firms, some work out of their home. Some have institutional expertise, some have a healthcare focus. Like anything else, if you need to hire an OPM, your selection should be mostly about "the fit". Who do you think you, as an owner, you would want to work with for the next X number of months? Who do you think could bring the most value and expertise to the table as your agent or owner project manager, managing your project? Your OPM should understand your exact expectations relative to cost, schedule and quality and then assess who the other team members should be. For example, if an owner is seeking a very basic office space at a modest budget, there should be no need to seek an out of town architect with extravagant taste as this would only drive up the budget. OPM's primarily work part time on specific projects meaning the individual OPM will not be working full time on your project unless it is a very large project, say over \$20 million. OPM's have different methods for estimating their services for a project. Some will charge on a per square foot basis, some will charge based on a percent of project volume and some may charge on a time and reimbursable basis. It is important for an owner to understand who will be the OPM on their project responsible for the day to day responsibilities and how much time will that OPM be spending on their project each week. This is critical to know and understand in the OPM evaluation process as levels of expertise and time committed can vary from OPM firm to OPM firm. The bottom line is that the OPM should be charging a very small percentage cost of the overall project cost, regardless of how the fee is being calculated. Also, the OPM should ultimately be saving the client more money than the client is being charged for the OPM services. This is done in many ways; competitively pricing competent vendors for overall savings, efficient scope analysis and vendor allocation, schedule reduction and efficiency and also by reducing the amount of time

the owner needs to manage the project thereby allowing them to do their day to day job.

Hiring an OPM is a decision every owner with a building project needs to make, do I need to hire an OPM or don't I? Then, who is the OPM who would I like to work with and who is the OPM who I can trust to bring me, the owner, the best value?

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