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AT/LS/CoLab Solutions: Strategies for success when envisioning your next life science project

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Gregg Conboy

In March of 2021, Erland's Advanced Technology/Life Sciences Group launched a new collaborative service, dubbed CoLab Solutions, which was established to engage with the client and consultants at the "visioning phase" of the project to ensure the programming and design process is smooth and collaborative, and the finished product meets the end-users' expectations and requirements. Since then, we have put our program to practice on several new projects. These range from a 14,000 s/f tenant lab fit-up to a 79,000 s/f core & shell lab-ready renovation. With CoLab Solutions, our team partners with clients, architects, engineers, and consultants early on to yield a plan comprised of the most advantageous ways to execute a project. Today, I will share some of our strategies for success.

We are currently in the preconstruction phase on two tenant lab fit-ups, one that is 14,000 s/f and one that is 28,000 s/f. As lab development manager, I have been focused on reviewing each project's design drawings and performing various constructability analyses. I comb through the documents to identify challenges, errors, or missing information that needs to be resolved before moving on from the design phase, so that the actual building process is not impacted down the road. I then share what I've found with the architect and engineer so that these items can be evaluated and incorporated into the design. This process not only validates the design but also limits addenda and changes while ensuring maximum building component cost and schedule efficiencies; improves coordination between the trades to ensure maximum efficiency of project labor; and allows our team to thoroughly investigate the details ahead of time for a seamless construction process.

Additionally, with the ongoing supply chain and cost escalation issues, we have been focused on developing strategies to help minimize the potential impacts to our clients' budgets and schedules. The CoLab Solutions team is working to expedite critical early release packages and encourage architects and engineers to check availability and lead-times of specified products before contract documents are finalized. We are also partnering with key subcontractors and manufacturers early in the design process to help accelerate design, submittals, shop drawing/approval process, procurement, delivery and install, and meeting with suppliers to get buy in on projects before awarding to those subcontractors and supply chain vendors. Their input also helps us to build a realistic budget that meets our clients' expectations and visions for these projects.

Our team is also awarding scopes of work to our subcontractor partners as quickly as possible to lock in production and pricing. We are staying on top of getting submittals right after award and holding the design teams (and other project stakeholders) accountable to the agreed upon review and approval times to expedite the official release of materials. Appropriately communicating "hot items" to the design teams is critical to this process.

The CoLab Solutions team is continuously collaborating with our subcontractor partners to secure materials and equipment to guarantee delivery dates. At times, we are even visiting production facilities, making calls to manufacturers directly, and encouraging our subcontractor partners to have contingency plans for picking up materials from these suppliers to ensure we have what is required. Most importantly, our team is having materials delivered well-in-advance of needing them onsite.

When utilization planning, we are setting space aside for material storage and at times even incorporating offsite storage into our clients' budgets. This allows us to have 100% control of the materials needed for the project and minimizes potential schedule delays.

We believe that life science projects succeed in an environment where all disciplines work together to support tomorrow's discoveries and that's what we're here to do for you. As evidenced above, our team accounts for all the nuances associated with creating an optimal space that supports your R&D, workflow, and speed-to-market needs and adds real value as a trusted advisor. Let us be your partner in bringing the vision for your next life science project to a successful reality.

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