



## **Applying Design-Build to Professional Services**

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### Abstract

Design-Build is a common practice used in architecture, construction and civil engineering. In this context, Design-Build is a method of construction in which a single entity provides the client all of the services necessary to design and construct a project. Design-Build reduces overall project cost, improves quality, and improves schedule. But is it applicable to professional services delivery? This article explains how Design-Build can result in similar benefits for professional services clients.

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### **How Does Design-Build Apply to Professional Services Delivery?**

While Design-Build has been popularly embraced in the construction and building trade, its use in professional service delivery is relatively unknown. Design-Build does not apply as universally to professional services applications as it does in construction and building, but there are opportunities. In professional services, Design-Build applies best when clients need to develop a complex solution to achieve business objectives. One example of an opportunity to apply Design-Build is complex software development requiring developers with highly specialized expertise to work together to create an integrated solution. Another example of an opportunity to apply Design-Build is a global human services relief agency developing a plan for delivering goods and services on short notice to one or more to-be-determined locations. Effectively integrating all of the elements necessary for success (procurement, transportation, storage, personnel, language, security, finance, etc.) would typically require multiple suppliers of goods and services. The Design-Build opportunity in these cases is to integrate the necessary elements to the greatest extent possible, involving them early in the process – ideally at the requirements development stage – rather than doling out assignments or placing orders later.

“We found that Design-Build principles work well in a professional service environment, but were especially powerful when coupled with a client relationship building engagement process and products specifically engineered to create and sustain a trusting, collaborative relationship” says Paul Kirpes, CEO of the TPG Companies. The characteristics of an effective Design-Build partnership include:

- Client and consultant design and build the solution together, usually with a single, integrated team
- All parties have clear and open communication regarding requirements and constraints
- The client directs exploration of alternative solution paths, though these are often identified by the consultant
- There is a clear process with specific “check” steps along the way
- The relationship is characterized by a high degree of mutual trust
- A strong collaborative relationship is established early in the process, typically before requirements are fully defined

### **Wow! That’s really innovative... But what’s in it for me?**

In practical terms, the opportunities for clients engaging consultants for professional services using Design-Build include:

- With greater collaboration, there is increased potential for innovative, “breakthrough” solutions. Clients direct exploration of alternative solution paths.
- Greater knowledge sharing results in a more effective client / consultant partnership and better overall value from the investment. Client and consultant know each other better and are more likely to leverage each other’s strengths
- Less “wasted” effort from changes in direction or miscommunication
- Clients understand risks and total project costs earlier in the project
- Better results, faster, and at less cost

### **What is the Design-Build experience like from a client’s perspective?**

As a buyer of professional services engaging a consultant firm that adapts Design-Build, you will notice a few differences right away.

First, the consultant relationship begins much earlier in the project life cycle, ideally before requirements are fully defined. Engaging the consultant to collaboratively develop requirements and contribute to the development of the solution leverages the strengths of all parties.

Second, the consultant’s service offerings may be specifically adapted to more effectively Design-Build. For example, a consultant may offer more alternatives for scaling services so that you get the full benefit of proven industry practices delivered with a flexible level of service and at a cost that is right for the situation. Since “one-size fits all” fits no-one, professional services firms embracing Design-Build need the ability to appropriately size and apply services. “We care about our clients and about delivering value. We take the time to appropriately scale our approach to best fit a client.” says Patricia Grote, a TPG Companies Senior Consultant who serves agriculture industry clients.



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Third, the client and consultant create an integrated team. Right from the start, the team begins to develop an effective working understanding of each other's capabilities and limitations. This effectively leverages mutual strengths and builds a foundation for deep mutual trust. With this in place, clients can more effectively and articulate expectations and direct development of the solution. "Using a Design-Build approach with a client requires a greater investment of time up front, but we are willing to do it because it works. Clients find the relationship refreshing. Clients usually see benefits right away in the form of new ideas they would have likely overlooked or discovered much later." says Brian Amick, a TPG Companies' consultant.

### **Conclusion**

You have an opportunity to get the results you want faster and at less cost by selectively adapting Design-Build to professional services delivery. To do so, though, you will need to engage a consultant who is willing to work with you to establish a truly collaborative and interactive partnership to design and build together.

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