

# Making the Transition from Designer to Design-Builder

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## SUMMARY

If you are trying to make the transition from design-bid-build to design-build, it is important to understand the theoretical and practical difference between the two service delivery methods. Successful design-build delivery involves communication, integration, and collaboration.

## THE DESIGN-BUILD DIFFERENCE

The first lesson to learn in design-build is that it is nothing—not a single thing—like design-bid-build. In other words, we can't just tweak the traditional design-bid-build model and somehow come out the other end with the process miraculously transformed. How could we? Approaching the new model with old attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions would make the new approach look an awful lot like the old approach—and, frankly, although the results may improve, the opportunity for performance optimization will be missed.

The question you must ask yourself is “Do I want to do this thing right? Do I want to take advantage of all the benefits that this single-source, collaborative process can deliver?” Design-build is not just a contract type; it is a whole new way of thinking—a whole new way of doing business. It requires a paradigm shift. The shift will be much harder if you don't first understand the fundamental differences between the two project delivery methods.

The nuances associated with the fundamental design-build concepts—especially design-build project management—can be complex. However, the bottom line is this: The only thing in design-build that resembles design-bid-build is the construction and construction methods themselves.

Yes, a design-bid-build crane looks just like a design-build crane. We finish concrete in design-build the same way we finish concrete in design-bid-build. Other than the construction methods themselves, however, nothing about the process looks like design-bid-build.

The best way to get the most out of the design-build project delivery method is to first fully comprehend

just how different it really is. So the one best lesson to get out of this article is to stop trying to “fit” design-build into the old design-bid-build mold; if you do, you risk missing out on the level of project success possible when you fully engage the design-build process. The differences that seem difficult to grasp initially are exactly the same differences that allow for the process to work—delivering high-performance and often extraordinary results.

## HOW TO SHIFT TO DESIGN-BUILD

The three most critical skills needed for developing high-performing, value-oriented design-build teams are communication, integration, and collaboration.

One of the most difficult aspects associated with transitioning people from the traditional design-bid-build model to an integrated project delivery model is mental. Transforming a group of individuals with conflicting agendas, accustomed to working in a fragmented, often adversarial, low-bid environment into an integrated, highly collaborative, seamless team operating in an environment of trust and full disclosure, focused on delivering the highest and best value, is no easy task. People don't necessarily know how to break the negative, counterproductive habits of design-bid-build that discourage cooperation.

An integrated approach is much more than a project delivery method. The “integrated mindset” describes a particular set of distinct skills and talents. Not every architect, contractor, or engineer possesses this mindset or can make this mental shift to optimize the benefits and intent of the design-build project delivery approach. Without this mindset, the operational behavior and performance of the team won't necessarily look much different than design-bid-build.

Fundamental concepts can be learned that help teams perform at a higher level, delivering results that consistently meet or exceed owner expectations while typically reducing costs, increasing value, and saving time. Once you experience what is possible with an integrated team, you will be spoiled for doing it any other way.

### About the Contributor

Barbara Jackson, PhD, DBIA, is a professor of construction management at the College of Architecture and Environmental Design at California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo, Calif., and director of the California Center for Construction Education, an educational outreach organization that serves the AEC industry. Jackson's focus is on integrated project delivery, design-build project management, and interdisciplinary collaboration.

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### RESOURCES

#### More Best Practices

The following AIA Best Practices provide additional information related to this topic:

- 12.03.02 How Roles Change in Design-Build
- 16.01.01 Defining the Architect's Basic Services
- 12.03.05 Partnering and Teaming to Improve Design-Build Success

#### For More Information on This Topic

See also "Design-Build" by Ron Gupta, AIA, and Paul Doherty, AIA, *The Architect's Handbook of Professional Practice*, 13th edition, Chapter 18, page 612.



See also the 14th edition of the *Handbook*, which can be ordered from the AIA Bookstore by calling 800-242-3837 (option 4) or by email at [bookstore@aia.org](mailto:bookstore@aia.org).



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#### Key Terms

- Leadership
- Disciplines
- Construction disciplines
- Design-build