

TEAMWORK, PROPOSALS, AND HIRING DECISIONS

By Rachel Yoka, LEED AP BD+C, CPSM

There are plenty of inspirational sayings on teamwork that are often applied to consulting and project work. These are frequently referenced in requests for proposals (RFPs) for studies, design, and construction.

Clients and owners, understandably, want to hire firms and teams that have successful prior project experience. The flip side is that as architects and engineers, we prefer to work with other firms we trust and with whom we have shared project experience and good working relationships. These successful teams have much value to offer a client, eliminating potential learning curves and miscommunication and even advancing project schedules through close coordination.

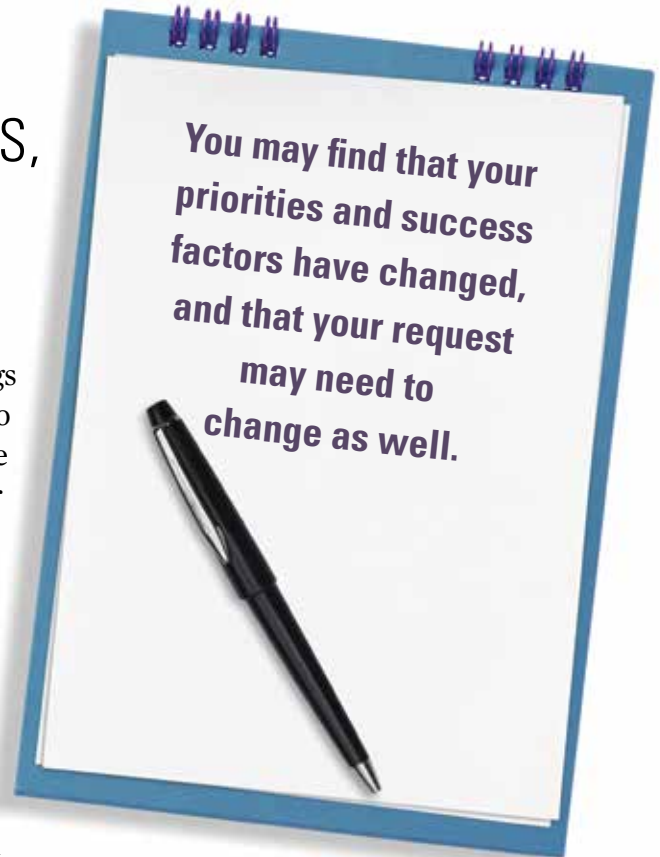
Perhaps there is value, however, in considering new team relationships. New relationships can create friction, but they can also bring change (the good kind). They may spur creativity and innovation by different and unique individuals collaborating for the first time. They may see opportunities (and pitfalls) established teams could miss.

We have a comfort level with people we have known for years through that same shared experience. The Pareto Principle would dictate that 80 percent of our work comes from 20 percent of our clients (generally existing ones). I find this to be anecdotally true. Certainly developing and maintaining successful client-consultant relationships makes sense, fostering understanding, communication, and, of course, the likability factor. People work with (and hire) people they like.

When evaluating whether to pursue work, it is always worth considering the emotional connection between potential clients and the competition. (It's generally not listed on the evaluation criteria, but I guarantee it matters.) When hiring a team, this is a critical success factor, but it should be one among many important criteria. Perhaps a new kind of project or specialized study would benefit from considering a firm for a first assignment, for the same potential for change, creativity, and innovation.



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A Changing World

Our industry is changing—nearly every article in this magazine will mention the increasing role and complexity of technology, sustainability, or evolving consumer preferences. Our projects (and yours) are getting more complex as well. The days of simple supply-demand parking studies and plain stand-alone concrete garage design are in the past. Projects often demand specialized expertise, perhaps in TDM, renewable energy supply, or mobile applications. As a result, we often need to forge new relationships that are responsive and effective to project needs and RFPs.

As our industry evolves, our approach to providing smart, effective planning and design services will need to evolve as well. When writing proposal requests or evaluating responses, it may be worth taking a fresh look at your criteria and typical hiring process. Do you start with a boilerplate request and just update a few sections? When we need to create something new, it's often helpful to do a "white paper" or "blank page" exercise. Start with a blank page when writing, in lieu of just updating something from a previous project. You may find that your priorities and success factors have changed and that your request may need to change as well.

It only takes one project to build a successful team, with an effective and careful evaluation of its project approach and teaming strategy. **P**