



RHarper Consulting Update

Interactive Development

As the economy begins its slow recovery, more institutions are dusting off their expansion plans and proceeding with campus re-positioning, renovations, and new construction. Whether they are academic institutions, senior housing, or public sector projects, sponsors are finding that they can benefit by bringing specialized development management resources into the planning and implementation of these projects. Such resources are particularly helpful to the many institutions, both public and private, which have cut staff across the board during the past several years and no longer have the resources in house to effectively undertake major capital expansion projects.

A significant number of institutions have found that the most cost effective approach is to bring in strategic planning, program management, and development professionals to integrate with existing staff and provide an interactive development approach. Interactive development blends state-of-the-art project planning and implementation processes and techniques with institutional knowledge and resources to provide a seamless cost effective integrated project delivery. Using this approach, sponsors are able to focus on the strategic goals of their projects and keep close watch on budget and schedule planning while realizing the benefits of experienced program management in managing the development process.

Let's look at how interactive development works:

Assembling the Team – Finding the right development partner is critical to the process. Choosing a partner with the requisite technical skills is pretty straightforward, but finding a development team with the requisite listening and people skills may be more challenging. Look for a team that has a history of working with similar sponsors on comparable projects. Check references, particularly with respect to how well the development partner proactively sought out and implemented the project goals.

Strategic Planning - Involving the development partner in the strategic planning process is essential. The development partner must fully understand and integrate the strategic goals into the project program, budget, and schedule, and provide realistic



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feedback about implementation and completion challenges.

Integration of Internal Resources – This is the area where sponsors often overestimate their capabilities. A major capital expansion or new construction project requires a tremendous amount of time and focus, as well as technical expertise. Many fail to ask the simple question: “if our facilities manager is working on the new project full time, who is doing his job?” The answer is obvious - neither the manager’s regular job nor the project gets enough attention, and problems arise quickly. Be realistic about the resources required, and outsource to qualified professionals. The facilities group is an important stakeholder and provides invaluable input for project success; many sponsors mistakenly overburden their internal resources.

Role of the Development Partner – Once the strategic vision is established, the development partner can be the primary implementer in assembling the most qualified project team, including designers, finance sources, entitlements, pre-construction services, construction, and building commissioning. Each step of the process is implemented with the requisite involvement of the sponsor, but the development partner is accountable for bringing the decisions to the sponsor with all of the information and options fully developed.

Maximum leverage of available resources is the key to success in today’s economy, and interactive development provides a major tool in that process. It provides the organization with expert, specific guidance throughout the development process, while allowing existing staff and resources to continue addressing their responsibilities with a minimum of distraction. While interactive development may initially appear to be simply an added expense, it is increasingly proving itself to be a wise and effective application of development resources.

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RHarper Consulting Group provides development consulting, program management, and owner representation services focused on the senior living and mixed use sectors. In addition, Mr. Harper is also a listed mediator and arbitrator providing dispute resolution services for the construction and real estate industries.

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