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Design Excellence in the Concept Development Process

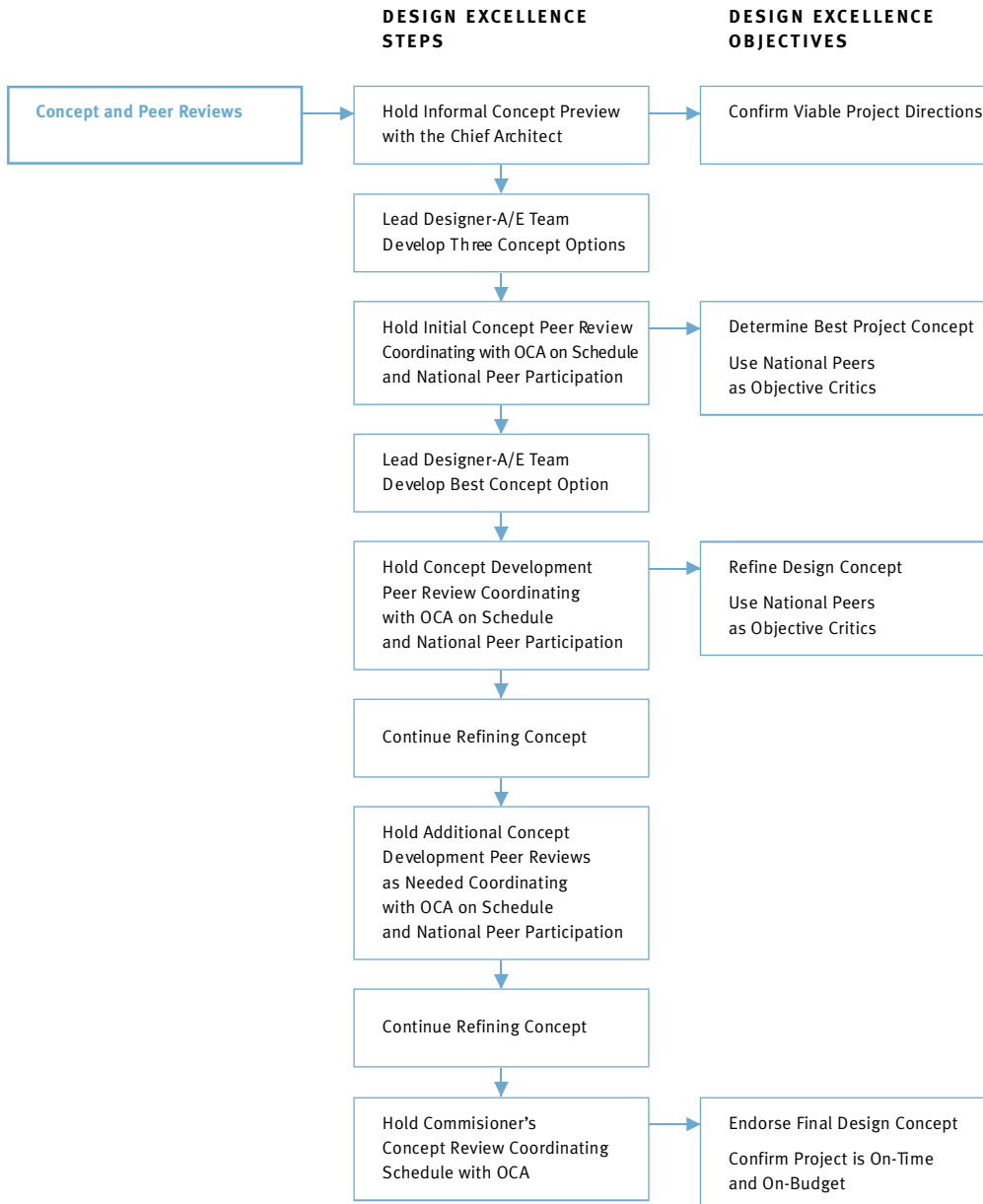
Design Excellence in the Concept Development Process

7.0 Introduction

It is well known that quality outcomes are determined in the early stages of design. Decisions made during concept development and design development are ultimately the choices that not only determine the formal and programmatic dimensions of a project but also such issues as comfort, flexibility, construction challenges, budget, and schedule. Long-term success, then, is dependent on making the wisest choices during the earliest stages of design.

It is in this context that the Design Excellence Process includes several concept development reviews. The broad objective is to have discussions among professionals that focus on design not only as it impacts issues of form and detail but also as it effects on-time/on-budget delivery. These conversations can address general design strategies and urban context to more specific topics such as materials and building systems. The chart offers an overview of the steps and options in this phase of Design Excellence. A more detailed explanation follows.

Concept Development: The Several Types of Concept Reviews



7.1 The Three Types of Concept Development Reviews

Project Managers must convene a minimum of three concept development reviews, including two with national peers:

INFORMAL OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ARCHITECT “CONCEPT PREVIEW”

This is a relaxed conversation among the lead designer, key representatives of the GSA project management team, and the Chief Architect. It should occur as the three required concept options are being finalized. The purpose of this “p review” is to make sure that all three concept options are compelling and viable from a siting, design, programming, budget, and schedule perspective. The goal is to know that concepts, as they will be presented to the peers and customer, are realistic Design Excellence strategies—that they are architecturally outstanding, do not contain budget-busting features, and meet the customer’s needs and requirements.

Depending on what is most convenient, the OCA concept preview can be held in the Office of the Chief Architect or in the region.

Those attending this review, as already noted, are the individuals responsible for providing and managing the design services—the lead designers, the Chief Architect, and key members of the GSA project management team. Peers and the customer are not involved.

As is the case for all design concept reviews, the schedule should be handled through the OCA Center for Design Excellence and the Arts with as much advance notice as possible.

INITIAL PEER REVIEW OF CONCEPT OPTIONS

This occurs with the benefit of the input from the OCA concept preview as the design team finalizes three distinctive and viable conceptual design alternatives. The purpose of this review is to have distinguished private-sector peers from the GSA Public Buildings Service Commissioner’s National Register of Peer Professionals help GSA critique the

concept options and zero-in on the best concept strategy. The discussion can include an assessment of the fit between the program and various design approaches, siting and urban design issues, major spatial and architectural features, and an evaluation of special concerns related to such topics as structure or sustainability. The goal is not to generate a final endorsement or resolve specific problems but to have a candid professional conversation identifying design directions that will best meet GSA's objectives and the needs of the customer.

For new construction, the venue for this review is usually the lead designer's office. For major R&A, modernization, and preservation projects, this review should be held in the community where the existing facility is located so that peers have the option of visiting the site and the building.

This review is convened by the Chief Architect and involves three national peers—including the peer that participated in the A/E Selection process. Observers, if any, should be kept to an absolute minimum. The meeting is intended as a constructive discussion among professional stakeholders and not a presentation. The presence of observers discourages candid dialogue. In this context, there should be time for the national peers to meet privately to flesh out and organize their comments.

As is the case for all design reviews, the schedule should be handled through the OCA Center for Design Excellence and the Arts with six weeks advance notice in order to confirm the participation of the national peer involved in the A/E selection and allow the Center to appoint and confirm the participation of two other highly qualified national peers.

FINAL CONCEPT PEER REVIEWS

This review should be scheduled as the final design concept is well developed in terms of form, structure, major systems, and materials. At the same time, these decisions should

not be set in concrete. The timing should allow for further changes and refinements based on peer input. The goal, here, is to understand how the chosen concept has evolved and identify areas and pathways for making additional improvements. These might deal with urban design, security and entrance issues, architectural forms and spatial sequence, the fabric and materiality of the design, and insights regarding engineering, sustainability, efficiency and workplace design. Like the three-concept review, the purpose of the review is not to mandate solutions but to highlight opportunities to strengthen the design and fulfill project requirements. If significant changes are needed, the Chief Architect can recommend additional peer reviews to provide continued feedback in the concept development process.

For new construction, the venue for this review is usually the lead designer's office. For major R&A, modernization, and preservation projects, this review can be held in regional headquarters or in the community where the existing facility is located to accommodate a site visit.

All concept development peer reviews are convened by the Chief Architect with the same three national peers that critiqued the concept options. To assure candid discussion, observers, if any, should be kept to an absolute minimum, and the meeting should allow time for the national peers to meet privately to flesh out and organize their comments.

Reiterating a general rule of thumb, the schedule should be handled through the OCA Center for Design Excellence and the Arts with six weeks advance notice in order to confirm the participation of the national peers.

7.2 Peer Review Agenda

Peer reviews generally last three to four hours (not including site visits). The agenda should have these elements:

- Site Visit (for major R&A, modernization, and preservation projects)
- Project and Team Introductions
- Design Presentation
- Peer Questions
- Private Discussion among the Peers
- Peer Recommendations and Further Discussion
- Summary of Conclusions

7.3 The Commissioner's Concept Presentation

This is a presentation to GSA's Commissioner of the Public Buildings Service. It is the final review before moving into the design development phase of a project. By the time this meeting is organized, the general design, spatial qualities, materials, systems, and, if possible, the works of art for the project must be clearly defined. Independent estimates must confirm that costs are within budget, and a timeline must indicate how the building can be delivered on schedule. Ideally, the customer should feel its needs and priorities have been addressed. While there are always questions and comments at this meeting, the nature of this gathering is an affirmation that a project meets the high standards of the Design Excellence Program.

Those present include the Commissioner, Chief Architect, the design team, GSA project manager, representatives from the region, the OCA project coordinator, key GSA managers, and a cross section of customer representatives. The artists should attend to share that contribution. The peers are not there since, at this juncture, their insights have already been incorporated. At the conclusion of the meeting, the expectation is that the

Commissioner will officially endorse the concept design so the project can move forward. If any of the Commissioner's comments require further development, these will be sent to the region in writing.

7.4 Peer Roles in Concept Reviews

Peers from the Commissioner's National Register of Peer Professionals are objective, outside voices in the concept development discussion. They are challenged to address GSA's projects with a fresh vision and critiques that maintain the emphasis on Design Excellence. Three peers—rather than just a single peer—are invited at this stage in order to broaden the spectrum of expertise and bring new perspectives to the project. Depending on the project, peers can represent architecture, urban design, preservation, interior design, engineering, and other design expertise. The Center for Design Excellence and the Arts makes every effort to choose peers whose insights best contribute to the success of each project.

As they participate in the initial and final concept reviews, peers act in these capacities:

- **As a Colleague among Professionals**
They should offer their advice and critiques with respect. Their interaction with the design team and customer should emphasize being helpful and not just critical. They are not there to second-guess overall design strategies but to identify collegially the best pathway for each project.
- **As a Sounding Board**
They should confirm promising directions. They should point out missed opportunities. They should engage the design team in a conversation about options and ways to improve each project. They should suggest scenarios for further development.

- **As Experts on a Broad Range of Issues**

As they review projects, the peers should feel free to comment on such issues as urban design and siting, design and spatial strategies, materials and systems, as well as on special topics such as preservation, sustainability, and interior and workplace design.

Resources and Sample Documents

Sample Documents

Many sample documents are available as on-line Word files—go to:

http://insite.pbs.gsa.gov/PM/PMB/Design_Excellence_and_the_Arts

These Word documents can be used as templates by entering the requested information, shown as **COLORED BOLD TEXT IN CAPS**, and/or selecting and deleting other appropriate text, which generally have instructions in **COLORED BOLD CAPS**, with narrative options noted in non-bold colored text. Once the appropriate edits are complete, final documents can be high-lighted and reformatted entirely in black text.

Sample Peer Review Agenda

Sample Peer Review Agenda

PROJECT NAME Peer Review

DATE

Agenda

- 10:00 Introductions
- 10:10 Project Tour
(INCLUDE FOR MAJOR R:A, MODERNIZATION, AND PRESERVATION PROJECTS. IF A TOUR IS NOT NECESSARY, ADJUST AGENDA AND SCHEDULE TO COMPLETE THE PEER REVIEW IN EITHER THE MORNING OR THE AFTERNOON)
- 12:00 Lunch Break (on your own)
- 1:00 Design Presentation
- 1:30 Peer Questions
- 2:00 Private Discussion among Peers
- 2:30 Peer Recommendations and Continued Discussion
- 3:30 Adjourn