

ACE Virginia Joint Owner Forum Recap with Greater Richmond Local Governments

ACE is a joint venture of the American Institute of Architects, Associated General Contractors, and the American Council of Engineering Companies of Virginia, to *educate and promote best practices of the design and construction industry*. In 2018, its inaugural year, ACE held three collaborative forums that engaged the Virginia Department of General Services and various higher education clients. We define *clients* as those with the authority to hire architects, engineers, and contractors or those that possess influence during the selection process of these professionals. What resulted was an improved understanding of what makes projects successful from the perspective of these key stakeholders, an intimate forum for business development, and an opportunity to learn about future project opportunities.

On February 21st, ACE had its initial Joint Owner Forum of 2019 at the Omni Hotel in Downtown Richmond. This year, we will engage various local governments from around the Commonwealth. This forum hosted stakeholders and decision makers from the City of Richmond and the Counties of Hanover, Henrico, and Chesterfield. The event was followed by a networking reception that allowed for more intimate conversation with the panelists.

The panel consisted of the following participants:

Mark Olinger – Director of Planning and Development Review [Richmond]

Edward Bass, AIA – Senior Capital Project Manager [Henrico General Services]

Al Ciarochi – Assistant Superintendent of Operations [Henrico County Public Schools]

Steve Rusch – Purchasing Division Director [Hanover]

Allan Carmody – Finance Director [Chesterfield]

Great dialogue was exchanged regarding **sustainability, upcoming projects, how to get work, the labor market and procurement vehicles**. Each segment included the audience in a question and answer period that proved to be engaging and valuable. The below sections provide a high level overview of the discussion.

Sustainability: Energy efficiency is expected regarding the design and construction of buildings. Henrico County Public Schools' aspiration is LEED Silver for projects. In addition, Henrico County has a dedicated energy manager who looks to reduce energy consumption while maintaining an interest for the push towards net-zero. Similarly, the City of Richmond has a sustainability department that explores how to reduce GHG reductions on projects. The City would like to see more integration of solar PV and green roofs.

Upcoming Projects: Each panelist provided insight on current and upcoming capital projects. In general, the region has invested noticeably in school projects. These projects range from deferred maintenance to major school renovations and new construction. Other upcoming project types shared were new libraries, fire stations, public safety buildings, and stormwater management projects. It was noted by the panelists that the first two years of CIP projections are the most reliable in terms of forecasting. They all said to look at their localities website for updated information.

How to Get Work: Each panelist stressed the importance of using eVA, or Virginia's eProcurement Portal. This is the Commonwealth's online, electronic procurement system that allows state agencies, colleges, universities, and many local governments to conduct purchasing and sourcing activities for

goods and services. Small business participation is encouraged by each locality and can be seen as advantageous for certain opportunities.

In addition, the below outlines the most prominent tips offered by these decision-makers:

- Demonstrate specific expertise in building type
- Bring the team that will be doing the work to the interview
- Follow the required RFP format in the solicitation response
- Remember that you are an extension of staff
- Individual credentials of team members is more important than firm name and recognition
- Over communicate and don't rely on email
- Show innovative approaches to solving the problem at hand
- Chemistry in the interview matters
- Know your audience when you write and speak (ex: for public schools, it will be K-12 educators)

Procurement Vehicles: Each locality utilizes the Design-Bid-Build project delivery method as its prominent vehicle. However, Chesterfield County has developed model procedures or PPEA /PPTA and exploring model procedures for Design-Build. Ultimately, the localities desire flexibility. The key point is owners need to have multiple tools available in addition to the traditional methods. Throughout the dialogue, several attendees indicated that CM-at-Risk allows the general contractor to bring value and insight to the project early which lends it to be a preferred project delivery method on certain project types.

Labor Market: The labor market for design and construction is challenging. In the design industry, it is proving difficult to find mid-level architects and engineers with 10 years of experience. In the construction field, sub-contractors must be brought on to the team very early. Timing of project solicitations is critical as sub-contractors are being lobbied for numerous project opportunities.

The next forum will take place on Tuesday, April 23 in Norfolk with Hampton Roads area local governments.