

ACE Virginia Joint Owner Forum Recap with Higher Ed Clients

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*. On September 25, ACE had its final Joint Owner Forum of 2018 at the Craddock Terry Hotel in Lynchburg. This session engaged our higher education stakeholders and decision makers from Radford University, Virginia Military Institute, and Virginia Tech. The event was followed by a networking reception that allowed for more intimate conversation with the panelists.

The panel consisted of the following participants:

Mike Biscotte, PE – RU Director of Facilities Planning and Construction

Col. Dale Brown – VMI Institute Planning Officer

Dwyn Taylor – VT Assistant Vice President of Facilities Operations and Construction

Paul Ely – VT Assoc. Director of Capital Construction and Renovations

Great dialogue was exchanged regarding **SWaM, upcoming projects, how to get work, best ways to engage with the university and procurement vehicles**. Each segment included the audience in a question and answer period that proved to be engaging and valuable. It quickly became evident that each university expected the design team to know the procedures specific to its institute in order to complete work effectively and efficiently.

SWaM: Each university is committed to the success of Small, Women, and Minority-owned businesses. It was noted that each institute is seeking to engage with design firms who have not yet worked on campus. For example, Radford University has used six different design firms for six different capital projects. VMI has recently selected new firms to help complete its work and shared that consultants who work on “post” must be ready to be a visible component of the VMI family. Virginia Tech representatives encouraged those in attendance to use ACE as a networking vehicle to improve SWaM participation in the Commonwealth.

Upcoming Projects: Each panelist provided inside on current and upcoming capital projects. Col. Brown shared that several renovation projects were in the design phase using CM-at-Risk and a designer had recently been selected for a new \$40M aquatics center. As Radford evaluates its capital needs, Mr. Biscotte looks to turn to renovating and repurposing existing buildings. Virginia Tech’s list of opportunities were expansive and included key projects such as the replacement of Slusher Hall, Jamerson Athletic Center Fourth Floor renovation, McComas Hall and War Memorial Gymnasium renovations.

How to Get Work: Col. Brown shared that a firm’s marketing is the last job it closed out. Each panelist admitted that they call one another to inquire about working with a firm before making the hire. The panelists shared what they expect from those who pursue work on their campus. There was a general consensus amongst the panel that their desire was for every architect who wants to be a part of their team to know and understand previous studies and master planning efforts. Teams are viewed negatively during interviews when they ask questions that demonstrate their ignorance of these existing documents. In addition, thoughts were shared in what they want to see in the RFP responses and in interviews.

Below outlines the most prominent tips offered by these decision-makers:

- Make sure the proposal addresses all of the requested criteria (*Have your staff grade your RFP proposal against the RFP requirements before submitting*)
- Know the CPSM [or similar document for Tier III institutes]
- Content is valued higher than “Slickness” in interview presentations
- Show the full team in your proposal (not just the Architects)
- The amount of time the team members have worked together is important
- The Project Manager has to speak up in the interview
- Make Sure the Interview Team is “THE TEAM”
- Typos indicate that the team does not pay attention to details
- Ask for a debrief meeting after you win the job!

Best Ways to Engage: Time is everyone’s most valuable resource. “Meet and greets” are handled differently at each university. For example, Virginia Tech does not take one-on-one meetings. Instead, it hosts a quarterly outreach meeting for all firms who are interested.

Procurement Vehicles: It was shared that a variety of procurement vehicles are used between the three institutes. Virginia Tech uses the most diverse methods that include Design-Build, Design-Bid-Build and CM-at-Risk. VMI and Radford use Design-Bid-Build and periodically will use CM-at-Risk. Term contracts are still a tremendously valuable tool for firms to gain experience at a respective institute and build productive working relationships.

The 2019 ACE Joint Owner Forum series will host local government clients to continue the productive dialogue. Please be on the lookout for “Save the Dates” as they become established.