

Ministry Facilities

CHURCH CONSTRUCTION

How to Choose a 'Design-Build' Team

The right group is vital to achieving a successful building project

BY TOBEY VAN WORMER

You can smell it in the air—fresh paint, sawdust, newly grouted tile. It signals not only a finished construction project but also an exciting new beginning for your church. Beforehand, of course, comes the designing and building. Selecting who will take you through those two stages is the most important decision of the project.

Increasingly, churches want a company that both designs *and* constructs the project. Here are four vital steps for choosing a “design-build” company.

1. Determine your needs. Most churches have to grow their facilities in phases. Set priorities on your ministry’s short- and long-term needs, such as a new youth center vs. a bigger sanctuary. Match the designer-builder’s experience and expertise with your project.

But first you’ll need to determine a few things about yourself, such as who you are trying to reach, what kind of facility will help you reach them, how much you can afford and how you will pay for it, when you should complete it, where you will meet in the meantime, and how you’ll handle the new growth.

2. Ask the right questions. Two aspects uniquely important to designing and constructing a worship facility are (1) state-of-the-art audio-visual (AV) technology and (2) an inviting atrium. Your AV system must enable the sermon to reach the back row of the balcony. Equally important is an inviting atrium because it is where visitors will be welcomed and members will mingle.

Choose a designer-builder that has worked on churches specifically. Here are some suggested questions to ask the design-build team:

Do you have experience with worship facilities? Have you worked on projects

similar to ours? How do you determine what we should build? Are there ways to lower square-footage costs? Will you provide us with a guaranteed maximum cost? What inevitable challenges do you face on any church project?

3. Listen for the right questions. You can also gauge the designer-builder’s experience by the questions *they* ask you. Here are some you should hear:

What is your membership? What is

your church and apply their experience to options that suit your needs. But avoid letting them steer you toward any single option merely because it matches their professional experience.

4. Build the best team possible. Construction programs require a team focus and commitment not unlike a marriage. This requires a relationship in which you can communicate openly and successfully work through issues. Difficulties



your average worship attendance (or “AWA”)? How many Sunday services do you have and what are the times? What is the average education attendance for all ages, from nursery to adult?

Others should include: What are the age demographics of your congregation? What are your historical growth rates and the trend of your current growth rate? What age demographic is your projected growth coming from? What styles of music do you prefer? What musical instruments do you use?

These questions show that the designer-builder wants to understand

arise, and a high level of trust and respect will be needed throughout the process. Ask yourself candidly, “Can I trust these people?”

You want to have full faith in the integrity of the company and quality of its service since this team will be occupying your “home away from home” for a long time. Adding trust to your diligence, thoroughness and understanding of the process will help ensure your success. ■

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