Project Delivery Models

Intro to Emissions-Neutral Buildings Series: Deep Retrofits

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ALBERTA ecotrust

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Delivering retrofit projects

Building owners can engage in different types of relationships with consultants, contractors, and other parties in order to see their retrofit project implemented. There are several common project delivery models in the construction industry. Each one has different advantages and disadvantages, so it's important to consider which model suits your project the best. Here, we will introduce common construction project delivery models used in Alberta.

Who is involved in delivering a retrofit project?

Construction projects, including retrofits, typically involve the following key parties:

- **Owner -** The organization that owns the building being retrofitted. This is usually the organization that pays for the retrofit work, whether through self-funding, financing products, or other funding sources.
- **Design consultants -** Companies responsible for designing the work to be implemented. They are typically architects and engineers. In many cases, there is a lead or "prime" consultant that does some of the design and hires other design disciplines as "subconsultants."
- **Contractors -** Companies responsible for implementing the project according to the design. This includes firms such as mechanical, electrical, and building envelope contractors. Often, there is a lead or "prime" contractor (sometimes also known as a "general contractor") who is responsible for overall schedule and project delivery. The prime contractor does some of the construction work and hires and coordinates other contractor disciplines as "subcontractors."

When to think about project delivery models?

Some project delivery models start with just the owner and design consultants. Other methods include contractors as early as the first design stages. This is why it's important to think about your preferred project delivery model before you start the design process.

What else should I consider?

Other things to think about when choosing a project delivery model include:

- How much project management expertise do you have in your organization?
- How much control do you want to have over the project?
- With which parties do you want to have contractual relationships during the project?
- How important is the project delivery schedule to your organization?
- To what extent are complexity and uncertainty expected for the project?

What are my project delivery options?

The specific contractual arrangements between parties in a construction project are diverse and complex. Most can be grouped into these four categories:

Design-Bid-Build (DBB)

In this model, the building owner first hires design consultant(s) to complete the full design of the project. The owner then hires a contractor through a competitive bidding process. The selected contractor constructs the designed project for the price specified in their bid. The design consultant(s) may also monitor, review, or administer the construction contract.

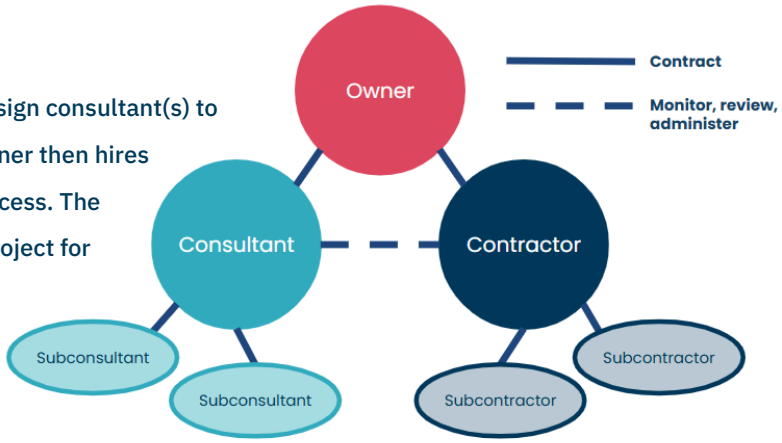

Figure 1: *Design-Bid-Build*

Construction Management (CM)

In this model, a construction manager is hired early in the project to oversee project elements such as schedule, cost, and construction methods. The construction manager may be an architect, engineer, contractor, or other party. The construction manager is paid for their services to manage the project. Rather than hiring subcontractors directly, the construction manager administers contracts between the owner and the other contracting disciplines, which are sometimes known as "trade contractors." This model is referred to as "construction management for services" or "construction manager as agent."

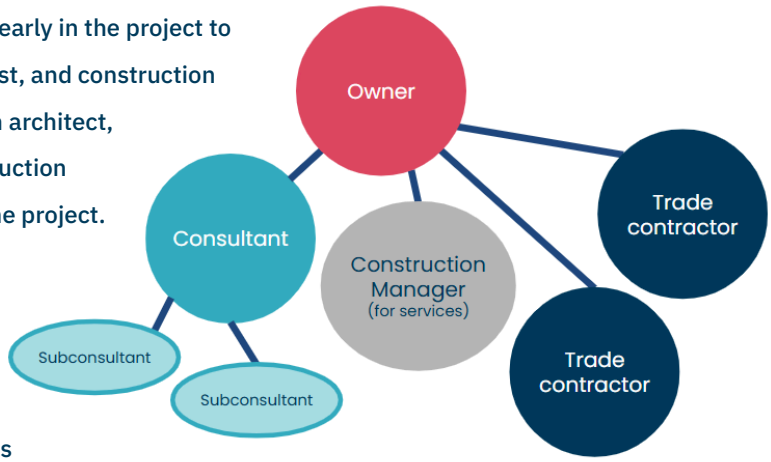

Figure 2: *Construction Management for Services*

It is common for a contractor to act as the construction manager. In the early stages of the project, they are paid for their construction management services as described above. As the project progresses, they often enter into a different contract agreement with the owner to become a "construction manager for services and construction." In this type of contract, they guarantee a price to complete the project and contract with the subcontractors directly. This usually happens after most of the subcontractor prices have been received. This model is also known as "construction manager at risk."

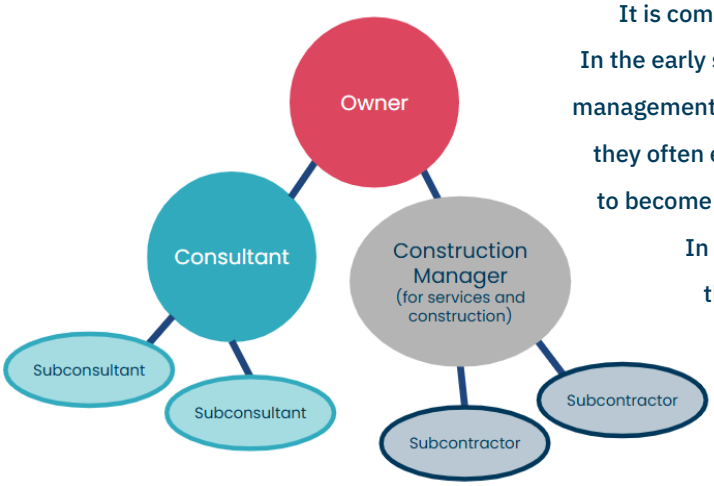

Figure 3: *Construction Management for Services and Construction*

Design-Build (DB)

In this case, the owner hires a single entity to complete both the design and construction of the project. The design-builder is responsible for delivering both elements of the project. A design-builder may be a contractor who hires a consultant to do design work, a consultant who hires contractors to do the construction, or a third party who hires both the design and construction.

Figure 4: *Design-Build*

Integrated Project Delivery (IPD)

This model focuses on collaboration. Key parties, including both the prime consultant and contractor, work closely with the owner from the start of the project. Other parties are also involved at an early stage. In this model, a single multi-party contract binds all key parties, including the owner and key consultants and contractors. The profits and the financial risks associated with the project are shared among the involved parties through this agreement.

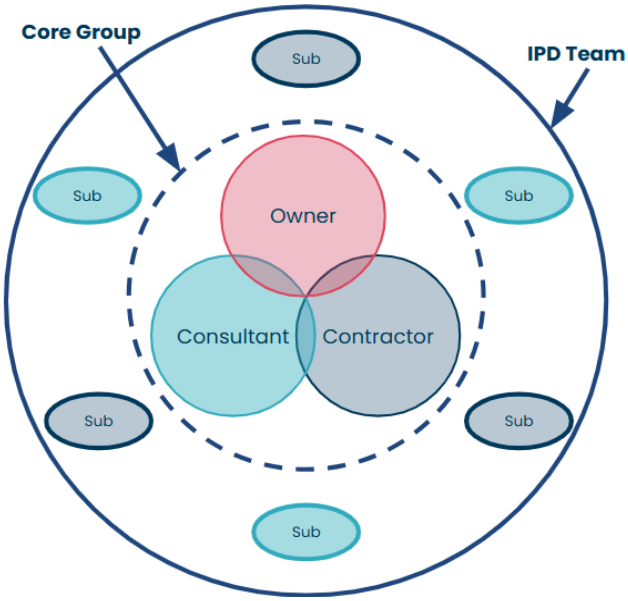

Figure 5: *Integrated Project Delivery (adapted from Collab Management Group, https://www.collabmanagement.ca/integrated-project-delivery-pros-cons/)*

Where can I learn more?

We recommend the following additional resources for further learning:

- "Chapter 4.1: Types of Design-Construction Program Delivery" from the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada's Canadian Handbook of Practice. This online handbook provides an in-depth discussion of project delivery models, including advantages and disadvantages of each. We gratefully acknowledge its content as the primary content source for this explainer. The full version is available at https://raic.org/.
- "Building forward: Industry informed procurement strategies for successful federal project delivery" from the Canadian Construction Association. This report, published in 2026, offers a summary table of common construction delivery models used in Canada and discussion on trends in the industry. The publication applies across Canada, with discussion on Alberta specifically in section 3.1.3.
- "CCDC 10 – 2018 A Guide to Construction Project Delivery Methods" from the Canadian Construction Documents Committee. This document requires payment to download, but provides a detailed discussion with an emphasis on fairness and balance for all parties involved in a construction project.