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# Design Build Institute hoping to spur flood of projects

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Public entities, like school districts and universities, are not known for being risk takers. Some even call them "risk averse."

So, those in the architectural and construction industries aren't surprised that a state law passed two years ago allowing public entities to use the design-build process is only now taking hold.

Design-build lets the owner hire one team to carry out both the design and construction of a project—unlike the traditional design-bid-build process in which the owner commissions architectural plans, then takes bids from contractors to complete the work at the lowest price.

Before Indiana became the 44th state to pass a design-build law in 2005, public entities were restricted to using the design-bid-build process.

But industry insiders are confident enough in the concept's catching on in Indiana that the Great Lakes Chapter of the Design Build Institute of America earlier this year moved to Indianapolis from Chicago. An Indianapolis chapter also is in the works.

With design-build projects, "all players are brought to the table for collaboration," said Rick Ford, president of the institute's local chapter. "It's like going to play a ball game and everyone meets in the parking lot first, then goes on the field to play the best game they can."

## Design Build Institute of America—Great Lakes Chapter

**Where:** 8940 Vincennes Circle

**Who:** Rick Ford, chapter president

**Who else:** 280 members in Indiana, Illinois, Michigan and Wisconsin

**When:** national organization founded in 1993; Great Lakes Chapter moved to Indianapolis from Chicago this year

*Source: Design Build Institute of America*

Ford, who is vice president of operations at locally based Esco Communications Inc., which designs and installs audio, phone and fire-alarm systems, said the design-build process offers creative solutions not found with the design-bid-build process because more people are talking to one another.

The goal of the Design Build Institute's chapter is to get the word out about the process and be an educational resource for those interested in pursuing a project using the method.

Founded as a national association in 1993 and now headquartered in Washington, D.C., the organization has grown to 16 chapters that cover all 50 states. The local chapter covers Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin and Michigan. When officers began changing late last year while the chapter

resided in Chicago, it seemed a good time to move to Indianapolis, where a movement was already under way, Ford said.

"Our group here had more horsepower than the chapter in Chicago," he said.

The passing of the law in 2005 was the reason for the movement, so a local office would make getting the word out statewide easier, Ford explained.

Everyone involved with the chapter does so on a volunteer basis, except for the part-time executive director, Libby Denehie, who was just named to take over the post from Gary Price, president of The Mattison Corp. Denehie also is with The Mattison Corp.

And while schools and other public entities have been slow to adopt the new process, resistant to change as they are, Ford said, their mindsets are changing.

"Schools have been slow to move forward with this," said Tim Thoman, a director on the institute's board and president of Indianapolis-based Performance Services Inc., an engineering and construction company that focuses on design-build projects. "They see great opportunities and benefits of the process, but no one wanted to be first."

So Indiana University took the lead, recently completing the first public-sector design-build project in the state. It's on its fourth such project now.

And South Adams School Corp. in Adams County has jumped on board and begun the first design-build project by a K-12 school district in Indiana.

The district is in the process of selecting a design-build team.

"I am very optimistic that we're going to get a quality building," said Cathy Egolf, superintendent of South Adams schools, which is planning to build a K-8 building and renovate its high school.

The school district should also save money over the design-bid-build process if research by the Construction Industry Institute at the University of Texas at Austin holds true.

Projects that use the design-build process, on average, are completed 33-percent faster, 6-percent cheaper and higher in quality by 10 percent when compared with traditional design and low-bid contracting, the research found. Additionally, these projects have half the claims and litigation issues after the fact.

"In a design-bid-build project, there'll be lots of problems that no one takes responsibility for," Thoman of Performance Services said. His company, teamed with CSO Architects, has one of the three proposals being considered in the final stage by the South Adams school district. "The problems are not the owner's fault, but they end up paying for them."

Thoman's company has completed 70 such projects in Indiana and pushed for the public-use legislation.

"We've been pretty aggressively marketing and educating people on this approach," he said. "There'll be a flood of projects after South Adams completes theirs."\*