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# Building the Design Team

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Every project, from the smallest renovation to the largest development, **requires the cooperation of multiple professionals**

Just like in sports, there is no “I” in team when it comes to architecture. Every project, from the smallest renovation to the largest development, requires the cooperation of multiple professionals collectively referred to as the design team.

The composition of the design team varies depending on the complexity and individual needs of a given project, and success hinges heavily upon the level of expertise, communication and cooperation of the various design team members.

#### **SO WHO’S ON THE TEAM?**

All projects begin with an owner who establishes the project vision and goal. The design team is responsible for translating the owner’s vision into an executed project. Along the way, the design

team is in charge of programming, planning, design, document production, filing the work, assistance during the bidding phase and administration during construction.



At minimum, the design team must include the architect and perhaps an engineer. For larger, complex projects, the team can expand to include a multitude of other specialized consultants.

To illustrate this, a residential apartment renovation might make use of mechanical, electrical and plumbing engineers to layout utilities and an interior decorator to choose finishes and furniture. For a historic preservation project, conservation specialists are added to the list. If there is foundation work, a geotechnical engineer will need to investigate the soil and design the proper supports. For new high rise buildings, elevator and curtain wall consultants are often necessary. Acoustic consultants, audio visual consultants, lighting designers, code specialists, expeditors and estimators are a few others that may be needed on any given project.

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For the purposes of cost and design efficiency the design team should be installed early in the process. As head of the team, the architect is responsible for identifying the list of professionals required. Once that list is established, the architect will often obtain competitive proposals and, with the owner's approval, hire the design team members.

In some cases, the design team contracts directly with the owner and in other cases they are sub-consultants to the architect. Either way, it is the architect's responsibility to coordinate the work of the various design team members. To help achieve this goal, a



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schedule is established at the start of the project setting forth milestones, meeting dates and deliverables.

Each of the design team members is responsible for their own area of expertise, but these areas overlap one another and need to be coordinated. Ductwork designed by the mechanical engineer for example, must be located not to conflict with the lighting designer's lights. The structural engineer's beams must avoid the plumbing engineer's gas lines. And heaven forbid if any of this gets in the way of the architect's design vision!

One of the key responsibilities of the design team is to organize a set of construction documents for use by a contractor to build the project, but prior to this a lot of research is required, designs are tested, and the various design team members produce preliminary drawings and reports. Coordinating the work of multiple consultants during the design process can be a herculean task, so communication and cooperation is crucial.



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The design team continues their work throughout construction, reviewing product submittals and attending site meetings. And, as with every construction project, unanticipated issues will inevitably rise that need attention: Materials originally specified might no longer be available, dimensions in the field sometimes differ from that shown on the drawings, or field conditions might necessitate a design modification. These types of issues always need to be resolved very quickly because as every owner will repeatedly state, time is money.

An architect, contractor or any other professional involved in the design process can't guarantee a flawless project. But what we can guarantee is that a well-chosen and knowledgeable design team, managed by an equally capable architect, will always prove their value when the going gets tough.

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#### About the Author

*As founder of Katz Architecture, David has more than 30 years of experience in the fields of architecture and design. Over this time, he has contributed to a wide range of residential, commercial, retail, institutional, urban design and preservation projects throughout the United States and abroad.*

**Katz Architecture works as a partner to clients, building managers, design professionals, and city agencies to ensure the ongoing integrity of our built environment.**

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