

Assessing Project Characteristics

The five basic parameters that play a key role in assessing which method is best suited for a particular project are the project's schedule, size, type, complexity and procurement requirements. Understanding how each affects the decision will allow for thorough planning and delivery option decisions.

Predictability of outcome is critical, given the complexity and importance of these communication systems to the owner's business. Often the owner chooses a process based on a balance of project definition and anticipated project risk. A longer design process is used to help define project scope, investigate and document solutions, and thus limit financial project risk to the owner during installation.

With system innovation, new technology and usage of unique combinations of technologies or software, the end result is not assured or predictable, the project has more risk and the owner will seek to protect himself with a higher level of investigation and quality assurance prior to contracting. (This may result in mock-ups of systems prior to full design and process selection.)

If the project is perceived to have sufficient definition or is fairly standard in the technology used, a simpler shorter process, involving less upfront work and cost, may be used with limited risk.

The opposite argument also holds that the owner will look to one entity to assume full responsibility for the solution and the risk given the complexity of the systems. In this case, the owner will look to the most "responsible" process/party to both design and deliver the solution.

The key to either process is the owner's planning and management of the risk. Often it is the owner's expectations that create the risk. Tight scheduling can also heighten the risk involved for all parties.

Project Schedule

The project schedule will have a direct impact on many decisions, and can be the determining factor in choosing which procurement process to use. A shorter project schedule may not allow for the full design-bid-build process, in which case a design-build process led by an AV integrator may be the better solution. A longer project schedule may be better suited to a design-bid process that is led by a separate independent consultant.

Project Size

The size of the project is an important parameter in deciding which process to use. For example, a large AV integration project for a new building that allows a longer schedule may be better suited for an independent consultant-led design-bid-build process. A small project with a project schedule of less than six months is generally better suited for an integrator-led design-build process. Other factors may determine which is best for "in-between" projects.

Project Type

An AV project may take a number of different forms. It may be a stand-alone upgrade or part of a new building. It may be a part of a renovation or a retrofit of a previously technology-free space. It may even be a maintenance project, where only selected items are upgraded, or a system upgrade, where all, or part, of an existing system is replaced with newer and/or more usable equipment. The project type is another important factor, along with size and schedule, that should be carefully considered in determining the process to use.

