



**Engineering Economics, Inc.**

## A Tool for Project Success: Owner's Project Requirements (OPR)



Successful projects generally begin with the end in mind, and the Owner's Project Requirements (OPR) document is an Owner's vision of that end. Championing the importance of documenting this vision, the US Green Building Council (USGBC) mandates that Owners or Commissioning Authorities (CxAs) develop an OPR for all LEED® projects. The OPR provides an explanation of the ideas, concepts and criteria that are considered to be important to the Owner, and it becomes the baseline against which the designs are reviewed. Ideally written during the conceptual project stage, the OPR should be reviewed throughout the design and construction phases, keeping all project parties focused on the Owner's goals and promoting a successful project completion.

By involving the CxA early in the process, the Owner can leverage the CxA's experience in OPR development and incorporate recommendations before schematic design begins and subsequent changes become costly. CxAs are familiar with a myriad of building equipment and systems and are able to bring a technical level of understanding to the development of the OPR – translating the owner's vision into a tangible project guide to assist the project team members in successfully meeting their respective responsibilities.

The OPR should include as a minimum:

- User or occupant requirements of the project;
- Environmental and sustainability goals;
- Energy efficiency performance;
- Indoor environmental quality;
- Equipment and system expectations; as well as
- Building occupant and operating personnel expectations

The OPR is not a detailed design narrative; the design should follow, and is typically developed as a response to the OPR. The OPR is also living document. As the design and construction process evolves, so does the Owner's vision. The OPR will be changed as necessary to meet that evolving vision.

In addition to documenting Owner vision and meeting USGBC certification requirements, OPR documents also minimize design assumptions that may not otherwise be disclosed. Further, the OPR outlines and establishes the following:

- Intended needs or special purposes of the user/occupants;
- How the building be used, occupied and maintained;
- Level of quality and system performance goals.

Time and effort in completing the OPR need not be exhaustive and time consuming; rather it can be a logical outcome of early project team meetings when scope and budget are still somewhat undefined. Not surprisingly, it can work in conjunction with the evaluation of best project options and assist with any value engineering/analysis (VE/VA).

The OPR is useful in helping define overall project requirements (particularly as owners become more focused on whole building performance) and incorporating elements other than mechanical, electrical and plumbing (MEP) systems. It is best to define the Owner's vision as early as possible and to designate who will be responsible for the OPR and for maintaining the document throughout the life of the project.

In closing, the development of the OPR should be the first step of a successful project, and it provides important value and direction to the project team with minimal effort if executed properly. The CxA can be a key stakeholder to help ensure that the Owner receives a building which meets and ideally exceeds the Owner's expectations.



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