



PRINT | CLOSE
WINDOW

Designing on the fast track

3/30/2009

In an effort to accelerate the construction of new public schools, the New Jersey Schools Development Authority is launching a new design-build pilot program that is expected to produce school buildings more efficiently. But while the program comes out of Gov. **Jon S. Corzine's** economic plan to generate more jobs for the state, local design-build firms don't expect to benefit from the new initiative.

The agency plans to begin work this year on 27 new school projects totaling \$1.2 billion, according to its chief executive, **Kris Kolluri**. The state last year allocated \$3.9 billion to its school districts: \$2.9 billion for special-needs SDA districts, and the remaining \$1 billion going toward regular operating districts, he said.

In a traditional bid-and-build project, an architect and engineer are selected first to create the project design; the contractor later bids on the design, which it then uses to build the project, said **Michael Wozny**, director of educational projects at **EI Associates**, an architecture, engineering and construction firm in the Cedar Knolls section of Hanover. In a design-build project, however, an architect and contractor team up and design the building to a certain degree, then bid on the project together, Wozny said. The team that is awarded the contract completes the design together.

EI Associates was the design-builder for the agency's first and only design-build project, the \$22.1 million Summerfield School in Neptune, which was completed in May 2006. It was the firm's first such public project.

Because of its abbreviated procurement process, design-build can reduce the construction time by six to eight months, Kolluri said. "In a period when we're trying to build more projects, this kind of truncation of time is very beneficial."

At the Summerfield School, EI Associates collaborated early on with the project's contractor, **Patock Construction**, as well as the subcontractors to work out any issues prior to bidding on the project, "so there's less confusion and less opportunity for any miscommunication once the construction starts," Wozny said.

At the same time, because construction is closely coordinated with the design, design-build projects tend to produce better quality buildings, he said.

The Summerfield School — the first LEED Gold public school in the state — had features such as a rainwater collection system for garden irrigation, low-flow plumbing fixtures and waterless urinals. LEED, or Leadership in Energy Environmental Design, is the U.S. Green Building Council's national green building rating system for the design, construction and operation of sustainable properties.

The new design-build projects will be required to receive a LEED Silver rating or higher, according to SDA.

Under SDA's design-build program, the agency will provide each design-builder bridging documents, or schematic designs, that are almost 30 percent complete. The agency also will monitor the design and construction process of the design-build projects, as well as their functionality once built, Kolluri said. The schools will be audited on an ongoing basis so SDA can track their operating costs, he said.

With the exception of the Elliott Street School — which was advertised in February — the design-build projects will be advertised during the third and fourth quarters of this year, begin construction by early 2011, with completion expected by 2012, Kolluri said.

EI Associates plans to bid on the projects once they come out, but "one of the difficulties right now is finding enough people who have the credentials really to do design-build," Wozny said. "There's not a lot of design-build firms that work on public school projects."

State agencies — with the exception of SDA and NJ Transit — do not have authority to put out design-build projects, SDA said. Because of this, "most of the existing design-build companies have focused on the private

market,” said **Greg Redington**, president of **Redco Engineering & Construction Corp.** in Westfield.

Redington, whose firm has done design-build work in the private sector, doubts many design-build firms will cross over and bid on the SDA projects. “A lot of the design-build firms on their own wouldn’t qualify” because of their lack of experience in the public sector, he said.

The majority of the design-build bids “are going to be from the same parties that have been bidding public work, only now they’re going to be bidding it together,” he said.

E-mail to elee@njbiz.com

NJBIZ, Copyright © 2009, All Rights Reserved.