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The Design Excellence Mandate

2.0 GSA's Public Buildings Service

Builder for the federal civilian government and steward of many examples of outstanding public architecture, the U.S. General Services Administration is establishing a reputation as a world-class real estate development and management organization. Under the auspices of its Public Buildings Service, GSA owns over 1,600 properties and leases more than 6,400 buildings and spaces. Ongoing projects represent \$10 billion of work including new construction, major renovations, preservation, and adaptive re-use. GSA manages 414 historic buildings, 33 of which are national historic landmarks, and has an inventory of 336 million square feet, the workspace for 1.1 million federal employees.

2.1 Design Excellence Objectives

In meeting the challenges associated with the stewardship of these resources, GSA's performance standard is Design Excellence—buildings that express the vision, leadership, and commitment of the government to serving the public and the values of the nation. More specifically, Design Excellence in the Public Buildings Service means:

- Providing best value to our customer agencies and the American taxpayer.
- Developing safe, productive, and attractive workplaces.
- Operating efficiently and effectively—keeping projects on time and on budget.
- Ensuring that projects respond positively to national urban and environmental policies.
- Selecting America's best designers and artists to create facilities that ultimately become respected landmarks.

The PBS approach is holistic, incorporating expertise in many areas—architecture, urban design, landscape architecture, interior design, art, engineering, construction, security, sustainability, and workplace design. Design Excellence is about using this expertise to deliver projects that are exceptional—models others seek to emulate. In this effort, Design Excellence is neither veneer nor luxury. It is an integral feature of the GSA culture and how the Public Buildings Service addresses its work.

2.2 Design Excellence Policies and Procedures—Program Overview

This publication describes the policies and procedures for achieving Design Excellence results in new construction, modernization, preservation, and renovation. It sets decision-making priorities. It details Design Excellence processes and schedules. It spells out who should be involved and these individuals' respective roles.

In terms of organization, since Design Excellence is most easily and cost-effectively achieved in the early phases of a project, this book covers the following procedures and phases:

- Design Excellence Planning
- Design Excellence and Site Selection Priorities
- FedBizOpps—Defining and Announcing Design Excellence Opportunities
- Strategies for Selecting the Lead Designer and Design Excellence A/E Team
- Design Excellence in the Concept Development Process
- Art in Architecture Guidelines

So that project managers have what they need to implement the Design Excellence process, most chapters have a resources section that includes templates and examples of critical Design Excellence documents. Documents are also available on-line at http://insite.pbs.gsa.gov/PM/PMB/Design_Excellence_and_the_Arts.

The formal Design Excellence Program was established in 1994 and, based on experience and evaluations over the past decade, has been refined and expanded in such areas as FedBizOpps announcements, the option to include a charrette as part of Stage II team interviews, and a more comprehensive approach to design reviews and concept development. These modifications are fully explained in this publication.

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At the same time, a consistent and essential focus remains: thoughtfully defining project requirements and selecting the most capable lead designer and A/E team. Another constant had been the involvement of distinguished private-sector professionals in the disciplines of architecture, urban design, historic preservation, landscape architecture, interior design, art, art conservation, engineering, and construction—national peers appointed biennially to the Commissioner’s National Register of Peer Professionals—as voices in the selection of designers and the critique of projects through concept development. The insights and expertise of these individuals are invaluable in helping GSA fulfill its Design Excellence mandate.

What is absolutely clear is that, as it has evolved, the Design Excellence approach to decision-making significantly enhances the success of GSA projects for customers and the American public. In this context, the managers responsible for GSA commissions should closely follow these policies and procedures.

In 1962, President John F. Kennedy disseminated *Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture*. These principles stated that the government should (1) produce facilities that reflect the dignity, enterprise, vigor, and stability of the federal government, emphasizing designs that embody the finest contemporary architectural thought; (2) avoid an official style; and (3) incorporate the work of living American artists in public buildings. It was an initiative where each building would be both an individual expression of design excellence and part of a larger body of work representing the best that America’s designers and artists could leave to later generations. Some 40 years later, Design Excellence is making this aspiration a reality.

2.3 Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture

- 1 The policy shall be to provide requisite and adequate facilities in an architectural style and form which is distinguished and which will reflect the dignity, enterprise, vigor, and stability of the American National Government. Major emphasis should be placed on the choice of designs that embody the finest contemporary American architectural thought. Specific attention should be paid to the possibilities of incorporating into such designs qualities which reflect the regional architectural traditions of that part of the Nation in which buildings are located. Where appropriate, fine art should be incorporated in the designs, with emphasis on the work of living American artists. Designs shall adhere to sound construction practice and utilize materials, methods and equipment of proven dependability. Buildings shall be economical to build, operate and maintain, and should be accessible to the handicapped.
- 2 The development of an official style must be avoided. Design must flow from the architectural profession to the Government, and not vice versa. The Government should be willing to pay some additional cost to avoid excessive uniformity in design of Federal buildings. Competitions for the design of Federal buildings may be held where appropriate. The advice of distinguished architects ought to, as a rule, be sought prior to the award of important design contracts.
- 3 The choice and development of the building site should be considered the first step of the design process. This choice should be made in cooperation with local agencies. Special attention should be paid to the general ensemble of streets and public places of which Federal buildings will form a part. Where possible, buildings should be located so as to permit a generous development of landscape.

Report to the President by the Ad Hoc Committee on Federal Office Space, June 1, 1962.