

The First Five© - 5 Steps To Starting Your Project

The First Five Steps for Any Project – Commercial or Residential:

1. Develop your vision
2. Pick a location for your project
3. Document your project
4. Match your project with the right general contractor
5. Check out financing options

Tips for the First Five Steps:

1. **DEVELOP YOUR VISION.** Sit down and envision your project. Try and conceptualize your new environment for your commercial or resident project. There are many, many avenues that you can take. We encourage our clients to dream because our job is to make dreams into reality. Use your imagination and just ponder the possibilities.
 - a. Is it an office suite on floor level, is it a stand alone building with your own style? Is your project a residential project, what home have you dreamed of or enjoyed visiting?
 - b. What makes you excited about your new project and what would you like to see?
 - c. Do you have a modern taste with a contemporary flair? Do you prefer a traditional Texas style? Does your business have an industry appeal or trend that is hot?

If you need help in this area, we are very good at suggesting and helping people evaluate options. You may be surprised about the endless options available for our clients' projects. We can sit with you and help you visualize and capture what you want. It may be over a cup of coffee, in an open field, at your home or at a new office building that we capture your vision. Regardless, we are there to share your views on what you want to create.

2. **PICK A LOCATION.** You know the saying! Location, Location, Location! This applies for both homes and offices. There are several questions you can use to help you evaluate and refine your site selections. Here are a few to use.
 - a. Does the environment look mostly residential or commercial and is that what you want?
 - b. Do you want quick access to major arteries?
 - c. Do you want to be located in a larger complex or your own building on a vacant lot?
 - d. Does the site match what you want out of it? Trees? Natural Landscapes?
 - e. What are the conditions of the location?
 - f. Do these conditions affect preparation costs?
 - g. Consider involving a realtor to help with negotiating value and as a resource for information about the site and the area.

If you need help with this step, we can help you evaluate a potential site for your project

3. **DOCUMENT YOUR PROJECT.** Just as much as location is an important part of moving your project from a dream to a reality, documenting the final product is a vital part of the process. Not all projects require the same attention, but all projects do require a final impression. We can work from architect's blue print, a CAD drawing, or even a cocktail napkin with the right resources. But as you progress through the steps of your project, your

vision will start to form in print and build into a final plan, ready for construction. Here are some things to consider.

- a. What is the layout you need? Are there groups of people that require physical flows of motion? Are there individuals that demand quiet locations? Is there a concern for sound or process management?
- b. What are the features you demand? Do you require a lot of use of water and plumbing? Will you have high electricity requirements? Or, are there areas you can save on space that are not necessary to keep costs down?
- c. Are there materials you prefer? Part of the documentation process may involve selecting building exterior covers, floor coverings, and use of windows or glass that should be evaluated for both design and cost.
- d. Most importantly, what is the budget you are working with? Many owners have had to scrap dreams or been disillusioned because, unbeknownst to them, their project was over designed. A beautiful set of plans for an unaffordable facility is time and money wasted. Creating a design build team from your resources or working with a builder/contractor who can do this for you will help you best match your plans to your budget.

If you need help with Step 3, we can help you pull together the right talent for your project. At GradCo we have a pool of experienced and talented professionals from all related fields that we draw from to bring together that perfect architect or interior designer. We will listen to what you tell us and put you in contact with our best professional for the job, creating a full service design build team with you in charge.

4. **MATCH YOUR PROJECT WITH THE RIGHT GENERAL CONTRACTOR (GC) OR BUILDER.** There are several qualities that you can use to evaluate and pick your contractor for your project. Decide what is most important to you and talk to your candidate contractors about how they match up to your most valued qualities. Here is a list of 8 qualities you can consider for their importance.

- a. **Certifications** – Texas does not have a state licensing program for builders or contractors so you will have to use other qualification requirements to evaluate your builder such as experience, referrals, and other industry certifications. For example, GradCo Structures and Homes wants to provide the best service to its clients so it voluntarily acquired builder certifications like Graduate Master Builder, Certified Aging in Place, and others to ensure the best possible service and certifications to its clients.
- b. **Respected** – There are many builders and contractors in the Texas industry with all the growth and benefits of the good economy. A good builder and contractor will often secure a lot of business through referrals from past clients. Ask your builder what marketing tool works best for them or how they find their clients.
- c. **Experienced** – Make sure your builder has experience behind the company.
- d. **Responsive** – Your project is your priority. You want to be able to coordinate your schedule with your contractor. Be upfront and tell them what schedule you have and work together to stick to that limit or work around variables. There are ways that you can control this by quickly making selections for your builder and making decisions as quickly as you feel comfortable. Additionally, if you request your builder work with a specific trade, be sure that they are responsive and don't hold your builder back. This is very important with lease arrangements as you landlord may only give you 30 days to finish out your lease space before charging rent.

- e. Local – As a Woodlands company, we pride ourselves on supporting local businesses and we find that using local companies for our work both provides a quality product while enhancing growth in our own community. Evaluate if this is a quality that you too value and if you want your contractor to be a local company.
- f. Quality of Vendors, Trades and Professionals – Just as you want to qualify the builder or contract you want to work with, your contractor needs to qualify their trades. The benefit of using a quality contractor or builder is to leverage their experience and resources. Having a good depth of trades and professionals to chose from helps reduce wait times and helps control the quality of the project. A good contractor will have all levels of skills and professionals at their fingertips to complete a project. Additionally, a quality contractor will also have satisfied trades who enjoy working for the contractor.
- g. Methodological – Every trade and industry has a process. Ask your contractor if they have a system or process that they find is successful for them. Our process is to focus on the clients needs while handling the building project from start to finish. We walk the client through the entire process from permit applications through change orders for new features that the client may want through to the final acceptance and issuing the certificate of occupancy.
- h. Successful – Just as you want a contractor who is experienced, hopefully that experience secures success for that builder. Ask them about their growth, increased revenue, if they are in good standing with their vendors, and if they have future plans for their company.

At GradCo we believe that a successful job is one where the owner and general contractor are united in thought. If we don't feel that we are the best fit for your project we will tell you so and help put you in contact with someone who is. But we know our talents and can say with confidence that we will work hard to be your first and final choice.

5. FINANCING YOUR PROJECT. Your building project is a major part of who you are and turning that dream into a reality will take a capital investment by you or a lender. If you want to finance your project for what ever reason, there are many avenues available. The SBA offers loans to small businesses as well as our local banks support growth in the community through business and construction loans. Consider your options and pick the right one that is for you.
 - a. Self-financing: Is this the best place for your money to work for you as an investment. Many have found after the 90's market dip that real estate is a better place for their money to work for them.
 - b. SBA loans: Consider the documentation and requirements, if you qualify, this may be a great choice for you.
 - c. Local Banks: A great resource that you may not have considered is a local bank. Many local banks design their portfolios to ensure lending to qualified businesses and homeowners for construction or business development. A local bank may also best know the market and its investment potential
 - d. Mortgage Financing: There are many mortgage resources available today at very competitive rates. Shop around and consider all aspects of the mortgage. Don't just select your loan based on rate, evaluate the turnover of loans (will your loan be sold after closing) and the lender qualification process (some may be backed by individual investors that demand special qualification standards to be met)

Part of the talent pool that GradCo has put together is a working relationship with bankers and lenders that know construction. They know businesses and what it takes to start them and make them grow. We will put you in contact with the right banker to offer you financing options that you may not have know existed.

Getting Started and Good Luck!

We hope this list was helpful to you in getting you started on your new project. We are available to you for help on any of the above steps in getting your project underway. If your project is as large as a new commercial structure in a commercial district or as small as a new outdoor kitchen, do not hesitate to call us for your construction needs.

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