

The New Profession on the Block: Estimators

Architects have long found that their talents for estimating construction costs have been under-appreciated by clients and fellow design and construction team members. As unfair a characterization as that might be, there seemed little they could do about it. Furthermore, for those professionals who are adept at putting together accurate and timely bid packages—architects or not—there seemed to be little recognition of their talents or adherence to ethical practices.

These are a few of the reasons that 20 construction estimators came together in 1956 in Los Angeles to form the American Society of Professional Estimators. It has been a long, difficult 55 years of development and growth, but the ASPE now boasts thousands of members nationwide and, in 2011, admitted its 82nd chapter, the Richmond ASPE.

The organization as a whole promotes education, ethics, standards, certification, and fellowship to further the recognition of construction estimating as a profession. The Richmond chapter, which currently has about 25 members, meets downtown the third Wednesday of each month. In its first full year of operation, the chapter was especially proud to have been chosen to host the Northeast Regional ASPE Meeting March 2-3.

With building planning, design, and construction getting more complicated by the day, the professions and industries have found certification as a reliable confirmation for clients and fellow professionals to know they are working with, to name just a few examples, trained and experienced sustainable-design experts, project and quality managers, specifiers, and non-licensed design specialists. Anyone with the background and ability can become a certified professional estimator, including architects, engineers, constructors, subcontractors, and building owners and their representatives.

Although construction estimation does involve a certain amount of intuitive ability that comes with experience, the ASPE focuses on one's ability to understand the processes and technical aspects of construction time and cost estimation. To be certified as a professional estimator, one must pass two examinations and submit a research paper for peer review. Daunting as the tests are, they are passable reports ASPE-Richmond President-elect Ronald Semel, AIA. In retrospect, he says, the certification was as challenging as he recalled the ARE to have been.

Ethical estimation

The national ASPE has established nine ethical canons by which it holds its members accountable for the good of the design professions and construction trades as a whole and the clients and public they serve. Those canons cover:

- Discipline competence
- Continuing education
- The promotion of inter-disciplinary cooperation
- Business and technical confidentiality
- Integrity and adherence to the law
- Commitment to making detailed and accurate estimates and assignments
- Rejection of “bid peddling” (revealing subcontractors’ bids to other subs to solicit lower bids)
- Rejection of acts of collusion or conspiracy (bid rigging)
- Rejection of the giving or receiving of gifts that might even be construed as bribery.

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Anyone who is interested, certified or not, is welcome to attend the ASPE-Richmond meetings, Semel says. There is a nominal admission fee, and the meetings are currently held at the Baskervill offices at 101 S. 15th St. in downtown Richmond. For more information, visit the ASPE-Richmond Web site, aspe-richmond.org.

Meetings feature time to meet and greet as well as a continuing education session. At the January 18 meeting, for instance, attendees enjoyed a lively discussion of moisture barrier design, installation, and costing led by a registered AIA/CES Provider. Noting that 81 percent of construction litigation is related to moisture infiltration, she showed properly designed details as well as construction site photographs that showed what is and what is not proper detailing and application.

Laps must be properly sealed, especially at horizontal-to-vertical joints and penetrations, which is particularly problematic when multiple trades are involved and coordination among them is not monitored closely, she said. Although the presentation focused on large construction projects, the continuing-education provider also compared cost per square foot of a variety of commonly used systems, their puncture resistance, concrete adhesion, and pros and cons of various construction practices. Attendees were eligible to earn AIA continuing education learning units.

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