Cogence Central Ohio Chapter Roundtable: Building Better, Together: How Owners Can Shape Smarter Project Delivery, October 29, 2026

Executive Summary

The Owners Roundtable explored how owners can improve project delivery through clear expectations, early collaboration, and consistent leadership. Panelists emphasized welcoming input from all team members, involving trade partners early, and embedding collaboration in procurement and contracts. Participants identified communication gaps, misaligned expectations, resource and skill limitations, and contract tensions as key challenges. Shared lessons focused on building one-team cultures, applying experience from past projects, and encouraging every voice across public and private settings. Workshop findings will inform Cogence's forthcoming Owner's Manual.

Session Overview and Purpose

The session explored Cogence's core approach: open dialogue, critical thinking, and practical strategies to reduce conflict and improve design and construction outcomes.

Communication failures were identified as the leading risk on capital projects. Addressing them requires empathy, shared understanding, and collaboration across disciplines.

The framework seeks to prevent waste, late change orders, and legal disputes by establishing structured collaboration from the outset.

Panelists' Views on Owner Leadership

Jennifer Son (Ohio State University):

- Build a project culture that welcomes constructive ideas from every level of the team, not just its leaders.
- Align architectural design schedules with construction manager (CM) delivery needs and involve trade partners early to help prevent construction defects.
- Include collaboration expectations in RFQs, procurement interviews, and contracts.

Jim Miller (Columbus Parks and Recreation Department):

- Used collaborative frameworks to introduce Construction Manager at Risk (CMR) and Design-Build into municipal project delivery.

- Treat internal and external stakeholders—from fiscal teams and city council to designers and field crews—as customers to build trust, alignment, and shared accountability.

Tom Brannon (Ohio Facilities Construction Commission):

- Connected experience evaluating defective work under multiple-prime contracting with the value of reducing risk through early trust-building.
- Emphasized that clear, consistent owner guidance shapes team performance and lasting professional partnerships.

Changing Culture Across Delivery Methods

- **Moving Beyond Traditional Delivery:** Shifting from Design-Bid-Build to collaborative models requires staff training, alignment with legal and fiscal requirements, and explicit support for flexible, cross-disciplinary problem-solving.
- **Investing Early:** Strong preconstruction services, early trade contractor involvement, and more planning time help reduce rework and ease compressed field schedules.
- **Understanding Downstream Effects:** Owners need to recognize that early decision delays can squeeze finishing trades' schedules and compromise workmanship.

Breakout Workshop and Outputs

Attendees worked in table groups, each with an assigned scribe, to discuss three questions:

1) What are the most common challenges you experience in design/construction projects?
2) What resources could Cogence provide that would be impactful upon your organization, relative to how projects are run?
3) Have you already used (or considered) opportunities to apply principles like COGENCE embraces, to benefit a project – and/or are you curious about how doing so could benefit your organization?

The findings will inform the forthcoming Owner's Manual, which the organization's Resource Committee is developing.

Key Project Challenges

- **Aligning Expectations:** Owners' expectations for schedule, budget, and quality often differ from the capabilities and understanding of architects, contractors, and trades. Participants agreed that teams need to interview owners more effectively to close these gaps.
- **Communication Gaps:** Participants described declining communication, with digital exchanges often replacing face-to-face conversations and making problem-solving harder. Silos within agencies and between co-owners also impede project success.
- **Limited Resources and Skills:** Rapid growth in areas such as Columbus has outpaced skilled labor development. Teams also need to educate non-industry stakeholders, including university user groups and public agency staff, who may encounter a construction project only once every few decades.
- **Contract Tensions:** Participants raised concerns about liquidated damages and incentive clauses, which can create an adversarial tone by emphasizing risk mitigation over shared success.

Collaborative Approaches and Lessons

- **Creating One Team:** Successful projects foster a shared mindset in which every partner feels valued. Leaders should move beyond "carrot and stick" management and draw on people's desire to contribute to a successful outcome.
- **Learning and Improving:** Agencies with recurring projects can apply lessons from earlier builds to future work. Participants explored a centralized Cogence resource that would give one-time owners access to the industry's collective experience.
- **Encouraging Every Voice:** Cogence holds that the room's collective knowledge exceeds any individual's expertise. When everyone feels comfortable speaking up, teams benefit from the full range of participants' experience.
- **Recognizing Sector Differences:** Public projects face distinct constraints, including federal funding rules and strict bidding requirements. The leadership principles discussed still apply in both public and private settings.

Conclusion:

The meeting served as both a forum for sharing experiences and a reminder of the importance of collaborative project delivery. Participants emphasized that the goal of these

sessions is not just networking for business gain but building a community that shares knowledge to improve the industry as a whole. The group concluded by highlighting the need to continue these dialogues and to proactively educate those who are less familiar with the complex design and construction process.