



BEYOND THE BID:

6 SIGNS OF A HIGH-PERFORMANCE CONSTRUCTION PARTNER

When you're delivering infrastructure that needs to function for decades, you can't afford to award on lowest cost alone. You need a partner with the operational maturity to manage construction risk, navigate regulatory constraints, and execute with precision under evolving field conditions.

The question isn't *who can bid it*—it's *who can build it without compromising schedule, budget, or system performance*.

Here are six high-value indicators that separate true partners from transactional contractors.



1

EXECUTIONAL DISCIPLINE OVER ESTIMATING FLASH

Experienced buyers know a clean estimate doesn't guarantee smooth execution. High-performing contractors prove their value through precise planning, clear communication, and relentless schedule control—especially when field conditions or procurement realities shift.

WHAT TO ASK:

- How does your firm manage schedule drift due to procurement delays or permitting bottlenecks?
- What systems do you use to maintain real-time schedule accountability across subcontractors?
- Do your project managers have experience working directly with regulatory agencies (e.g., Iowa DNR, U.S. Army Corps)?

2

RISK-CONSCIOUS COLLABORATION

Great partners don't just flag risks—they build risk into the planning model. Top-tier contractors should help you prioritize exposure, run cost/schedule scenarios, and align mitigation strategies with long-lead procurement and design milestones.

WHAT MATTERS:

- Deep familiarity with CMAR/EPC negotiation points and Guaranteed Maximum Price (GMP) development
- Clear risk registers integrated into budget and schedule tracking
- Demonstrated ability to absorb risk through self-performance if a sub falters

3

PROVEN PROCUREMENT AGILITY

Supply markets are unpredictable, and critical-path equipment delays can break a schedule. Top-performing contractors know how to pressure-test procurement timelines, lock in early packages, and shift sequencing to keep construction moving even when suppliers miss.

HIGH-PERFORMANCE INDICATORS:

- Pre-established supplier agreements and strong vendor leverage
 - Strategic early procurement of long-lead systems (e.g., vessels, MCCs, treatment equipment)
 - Field leaders and PMs with active procurement insight—not just clerical purchasing roles
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4

QA/QC THAT'S NOT JUST PAPERWORK

A strong QA/QC culture isn't reactive—it's preventative, accountable, and embedded across the field and home office. High-caliber firms don't wait for punch lists; they identify quality expectations early, enforce them rigorously, and back them up with data.

LOOK FOR:

- In-house or third-party QC programs modeled after U.S. Army Corps standards
 - Examples of QA involvement during design that reduced field rework
 - Quantifiable metrics on issue closure rates, inspection approvals, and conformance checks
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5

SELF-PERFORMANCE CAPABILITIES AT THE READY

In demanding scopes like deep excavation, utility tie-ins, or mechanical equipment installation, weak subcontractor performance can derail a job. Contractors with strong self-perform capabilities provide a built-in safety net.

WHAT TO ASK:

- Which scopes do you self-perform in civil and mechanical work?
 - Under what conditions do you activate those capabilities?
 - What's your average ratio of self-performed to subcontracted work on recent jobs?
 - How does your field team support subs when complexity increases?
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6

CMAR/EPC EXPERIENCE THAT HOLDS UP UNDER SCRUTINY

Collaborative delivery models require transparency, responsiveness, and leadership continuity from kickoff through closeout. The best CMAR/EPC partners are highly coordinated, nimble under pressure, and focused on protecting the entire project—not just their margin.

WHAT DIFFERENTIATES:

- Actual GMP-driven project experience with public entities and regulated utilities
- Documented change management and value engineering workflows
- Owner references that reflect reliability, communication, and post-award consistency

PARTNER COMPARISON CHECKLIST

Use this checklist to assess potential construction partners across key categories impacting real-world performance. Check all that apply and compare firms side-by-side.

WENDLER	COMPETITOR	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Contractor provides clear answers about how they manage schedule drift due to permitting or procurement delays.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Contractor uses systems or tools (e.g., Procore, P6) for real-time schedule accountability across subcontractors.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Project Managers have experience coordinating directly with agencies like Iowa DNR, SRF, or U.S. Army Corps.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Firm shows experience developing GMPs or leading CMAR/EPC projects with shared-risk planning.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Contractor uses risk registers that integrate with schedule and budget.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Contractor has demonstrated ability to self-perform critical scopes when subcontractor risk arises.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Contractor has strong supplier relationships and evidence of past early procurement success.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Firm has procured long-lead systems (e.g., MCCs, treatment vessels) early to maintain schedule.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Procurement is actively managed by field leaders and project managers, not just administrative staff.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Contractor uses a formal QA/QC system (e.g., modeled on U.S. Army Corps Three-Phase Control).
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	QA/QC personnel are engaged during design to help reduce field rework.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Firm provides data on inspection approvals, issue closures, or QA performance.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Contractor explains when and why self-performance is activated to maintain schedule or quality.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Firm shares recent project data showing self-perform vs. subcontracted ratio.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Contractor can describe their change management and value engineering workflow in detail.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	References (owners or engineers) confirm strong communication and consistent project leadership post-award.



DATA POINTS THAT MATTER MORE THAN LOW BID

- **EMR trends over time**, not just current-year value
- **% of projects delivered within 5% of baseline schedule**
- **Change order origin breakdown** (owner-driven vs. contractor-driven)
- **% of work self-performed** across last 5 major projects
- **Field and PM turnover** rates on active projects
- **Tenure of lead PMs** with project type, not just firm

RED FLAGS FOR EXPERIENCED OWNERS & ENGINEERS

- All gloss, no grit: Highly branded proposal with vague execution plans
- Minimal or outdated self-perform capabilities
- No real examples of VE or change management success
- Inconsistent field leadership or superintendent handoffs
- Over-reliance on a single estimator or PM throughout preconstruction
- **Doesn't ask strategic questions about your goals, constraints, or project mission**—focused only on specs and pricing

LET'S BUILD BETTER INFRASTRUCTURE, TOGETHER

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