

February 2010
Key Players in Multi-Disciplinary Design Change with the Times


In the May 2008 issue of TOPICs, the multi-disciplinary project design team was compared to an orchestra. The tenets of this analogy still ring true; the success of a project relies on the collaborative performance of many players. Nearly two years later, however, the landscape of energy project development has changed to call upon new players while heightening the role of others.

For renewable energy projects, the expertise needed to identify and evaluate transmission interconnections has gained “first chair” in the development orchestra. Transmission congestion is not a new phenomenon, but its effect on project siting processes has become amplified. With increasing regularity it eclipses all other “critical issues” when evaluating the viability of a project site. The importance of other disciplines, such as permitting and meteorology, surfaces later in the project timeline.

It is also becoming clearer that the project development orchestra needs to be seated differently based on the type of project, its location, and the evolving regulatory environment. Some projects, for example, require greater involvement by specialists in environmental permitting and risk assessment. The potential for sage grouse to be placed on the federal endangered species list, for instance, may bring what appeared to be a manageable risk to a crescendo, dictating significant changes in how wind projects are developed in Wyoming and nearby states. Environmental permitting expertise could claim center stage as habitat conservation plans and species avoidance strategies dominate project development planning in that region.

As always, the entire project team needs to understand the critical success factors of the project and remain adaptable in terms of how challenges are mitigated. The degree to which variables such as siting regulations, transmission interconnections, and financing strategies can each influence project development has become much more evident in recent years. For instance, a project facing challenges of equal intensity and importance may suddenly find itself focused on resolving the singular challenge of a local utility that has decided not to facilitate an interconnection. The team must then determine whether to obtain a transmission right-of-way corridor elsewhere, adjust project size to accommodate the utility's needs, move the whole project, or abandon it altogether. New regulations can also mean new setbacks that in turn require significant project redesign. A cohesive, flexible team of professionals can react in parallel to such challenges, reducing the time it takes to manage unforeseen risks and to keep the project moving forward.

Successful developers understand that orchestrating a renewable energy project requires not just the expertise of many disciplines but also the ability to cue up the right players at the right times. The importance of various disciplines will vary by project and will evolve with changing economic, market, and regulatory conditions. It's crucial to work with professionals that can play an inspiring solo as well as harmonize with the rest of the ensemble.



For more information, please contact

Aaron Tippie
 Director, Wind Energy
 aaron.tippie@westwoodps.com
 952-906-7464

Solutions
 for *your* **Success**

