



MIDDLE *of* SIX

AIA LOS ANGELES  
ARCHITECTING THE FUTURE

# Creating Proposals That Set Your Firm Apart from the Competition

October 29, 2025

# Session Overview

# Session Overview

1.

Selection Panel  
Psychology

2.

Common Friction  
Points in Technical  
Writing

3.

Understanding  
the Client

4.

Setting Your  
Firm Apart from  
the Competition



# **Selection Panel Psychology**

# THE SELECTION COMMITTEE

UNDERSTANDING LEADS TO STRONGER PROPOSALS

What's in it for me?



# UNDERSTAND YOUR AUDIENCE

UNDERSTANDING LEADS TO STRONGER PROPOSALS



## Motivations

Why does this project matter to them?



## Wants & Needs

What do they need help with and what are their goals?



## Accountability

Who do they answer to?



## Fears

What are their major concerns and how can you help the client overcome them?



# SELECTION COMMITTEE PSYCHOLOGY

'OWNERSHIP STAKE' VARIES, BUT ASSUME THESE MOTIVATIONS ARE TRUE



They fought for the funding.



They live and breathe this project.



This project must be a success.



The project's success = their personal success.



This project must matter to you as much as it does to them.



This project has implications. They want to know that you know what those are.

# WHAT SELECTION PANELISTS WANT & NEED



Evaluation



Solutions



Information



Inspiration



Validation



Entertainment

Can you check  
all the boxes?

# **Common Selection Committee Characters**

# COMMON SELECTION COMMITTEE CHARACTERS

## 1. The Project Manager

Positional power

Most at stake

It's personal

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Scrutinizes project  
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Calls references

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Loves infographics  
Scores higher on "curb appeal"

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Values compliance  
Substantially lowers scores if there are errors

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## 5. The Critic

Scores low  
Unforgiving  
Looks for reasons to say "No"

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## 4. The Editor

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Values compliance  
Substantially lowers scores if there are errors

## 5. The Critic

Scores low  
Unforgiving  
Looks for reasons to say "No"

## 6. The Advocate

Scores high  
Forgiving  
Looks for reasons to say "Yes"



**Questions**



# **Common Friction Points in Technical Writing**

# COMMON FRUSTRATIONS WITH TECHNICAL WRITERS

## EXECUTION

- ✘ Missed deadlines
- ✘ Incomplete or fragmented content
- ✘ Sent old content and swapped out the client's name
- ✘ Text is overly educational
- ✘ Buries the 'lede'

## WRITING OFTEN LACKS

- ✔ Storytelling
- ✔ The Why
- ✔ Skimmable elements
- ✔ Consistency
- ✔ House Style
- ✔ What the evaluator really needs to score you as high as possible

# Understanding the Client

Just who exactly is reviewing your proposals?



# SKIMMERS

- **Feel rushed**
- **Stretched thin**
- **Procrastinated and are now running out of time**
- **Have only a surface-level interest in the topic(s)**
- **Serve on a lot of selection committees**
- **Spotted something that made them lose confidence in the overall proposal**



# SWIMMERS

- **Feel a little rushed**
- **Zone out on too much text but perk up at the sight of case studies and sidebars**
- **Are interested in specific sections**
- **Is usually a skimmer, but something compelling caught their attention**
- **A non-technical expert**
- **Want to read more but have 8 other proposals to score**



# DEEP DIVERS

- **Meticulous attention to detail**
- **Deeply invested in who will win the project**
- **Deeply interested in the subject**
- **Deeply interested in your firm**
- **First time evaluator**
- **You converted a skimmer/swimmer into a deep diver**

# DIFFERENTIATE YOUR FIRM

## PUTTING YOURSELF IN THEIR SHOES



**Show them you understand the importance of this project and its value in the world/city/neighborhood/community.**

Maybe it's the first project for the client PM?

Maybe it's a project of passion for people on the team?

Maybe it's the first project after a bond or federal/state/local funding?

Maybe it's a career-defining moment for the client project team?

.....→  
**OUTCOMES  
OF INFO  
GATHERING**

**CREATES  
EMPATHY**

**INJECTS  
MEANING &  
EMOTION**

**PENETRATES  
THE WALL  
OF JARGON**

**HUMANIZES  
THE WORK**

# IT STARTS WITH THE COVER LETTER



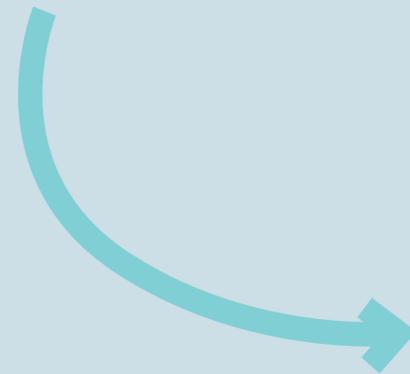
## Why?

The cover letter is the first thing the selection committee will read.

It's their first impression about your team's interest and commitment to the project.

Start with an opening that shows you know them.

Not, "We are pleased to present our proposal."



MIDDLE of SIX

October 2025

**Favorite Client**

Senior Associate – Director of Marketing & Client Strategy  
Incredible AEC Firm

Dear Favorite Client and Incredible AEC Firm team,

Incredible AEC has built a remarkable legacy—more than 116 years of design leadership that continues to shape communities across California and beyond. With your strong reputation, loyal client base, and vision to broaden your influence throughout the western United States, you are well-positioned to continue *Designing a Better Future*. Middle of Six would be honored to partner with you to ensure your marketing materials and website reflect the caliber of your work and the strength of your brand.

Middle of Six is unique in that we are solely focused on the AEC industry and our team members worked in-house for firms including Bassetti Architects and NAC Architecture. Every day, we work with architects, engineers, and builders, which means we understand both the nuances of project delivery and what matters most to your audiences of owners, teaming partners, and future Incredible AEC team members. We live and breathe AEC marketing.

From refreshing proposal and brochure templates that maximize InDesign efficiencies, to developing a modern, accessible, and user-friendly website, to helping refine boilerplate language for consistency and impact; we will bring both creativity and process discipline. Our approach balances design excellence with efficiency, ensuring your refreshed collateral and website not only look great, but also make life easier for your team.

We are inspired by Incredible AEC's values of integrity, leadership, and community, and see alignment with our own ethos of collaboration and clarity. We look forward to the opportunity learn more about your vision and deliver marketing tools that will support Incredible AEC's growth for years to come.

Appreciatively,

**Melissa Richey**  
Principal Marketing Strategist, Middle of Six

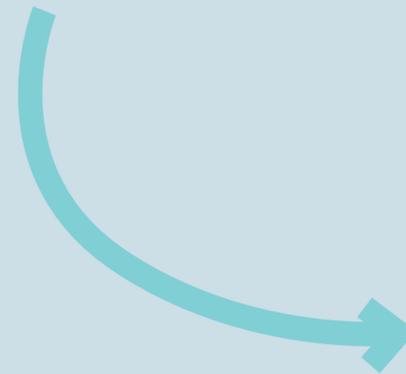
**Wendy Simmons**  
Founding Principal, Middle of Six

# INFO GATHERING



## Research client/project partner's website

Look for their mission statement and goals



The screenshot displays the Lane Community College website. At the top left is the Lane Community College logo. The main heading is "Vision, Mission, and Values". Below it is a breadcrumb trail: "Home > About Lane >". A blue banner contains the text: "Our mission, vision, and values help us focus on what we want to accomplish, how we'll know if we're successful, and how we'll help students achieve their dreams." Below this is the "Mission" section, which states: "Lane is the Community's college. We provide quality, comprehensive, accessible, **inclusive**, learning-centered educational opportunities that promote **equitable** student success." The bottom of the screenshot shows the City of South Lake Tahoe website navigation bar with links for HOME, COMMUNITY, GOVERNMENT, CITY SERVICES, and HOW DO I...?. A search bar is on the right. Below the navigation bar is a large image of a lake. A sidebar menu on the left lists: Communications, Labor Law Resources, Sustainability, Economic Development, Community Survey, City Strategic Plan, South Tahoe Transit JPA, and 2025 Community Academy. The main content area shows the "City Strategic Plan" section, with a sub-heading "2025-2030 Strategic Plan" and a brief description of the plan's purpose and adoption date (May 6, 2025). A link for "2025-2030 Strategic Plan" is provided. Below this, the "2023-2028 Strategic Plan" is also visible.

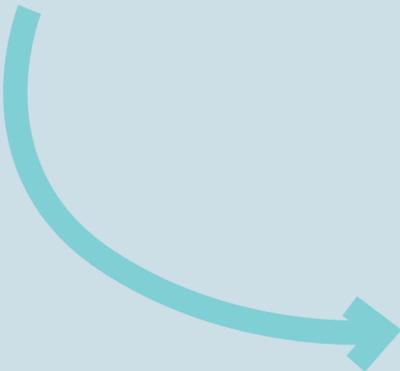
# INFO GATHERING



## Research client/project partner's website

Look for their mission statement and goals

The screenshot shows the 'Vision, Mission, and Values' page of Lane Community College. The page has a blue header with the college's logo. Below the header, there is a navigation bar with 'Home' and 'About Lane'. The main content area is white with a blue background for the introductory text. The text reads: 'Our mission, vision, and values help us focus on what we want to accomplish, how we'll know if we're successful, and how we'll help students achieve their dreams.' Below this, there are two sections: 'Vision' with the text 'Transforming lives through learning.' and 'Mission' with the text 'Lane is the Community's college. We provide quality, comprehensive, accessible, **inclusive**, learning-centered educational opportunities that promote **equitable** student success.'



**WEAVE M/V/V  
INTO THE  
COVER LETTER**

### EXAMPLE

As the community's college, you provide an enormous service—making learning accessible to all by eliminating barriers to education and creating partnerships with organizations in your region. Expanding your Health, Medical, and Fitness program by adding a new, sustainable, learner-centered building is an exciting endeavor for Lane Community College to undertake.

# INFO GATHERING

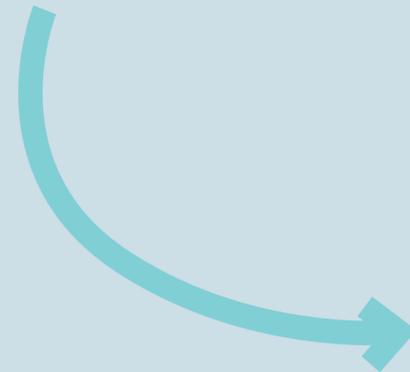


## Research client/project partner's website

Look for their mission statement and goals



## Use the RFP and project criteria to discern priorities



### INTRODUCTION

#### 1. Background

The City of South Lake Tahoe is a General Law City with a population of approximately 22,000. It has long been a premier destination for visitors worldwide and has successfully created places that meet their needs. The city has also drawn residents who desire to live in a resort mountain community close to outdoor recreation. The city has an annual Capital Improvement Program that requires additional inspection support.

**The goal of this Request for Proposals/Services is to retain two (2) full-time inspectors for the 2025 construction season related to two projects:**

- **Tahoe Valley Stormwater and Greenbelt Improvement Project.** This project is divided into two phases. Phase 1 started in 2023 and will continue into the 2025 season and is primarily stormwater upgrade improvements. Phase 2 is expected to begin May 1, 2025, and will continue into 2025. Phase 2 will primarily consist of stormwater improvements (basins and underground storm drain), surface upgrades (multi-use paths), and construction of public amenities and park improvements in the greenbelt area behind The Crossing. The total cost of this project is approximately \$16 million, with Phase 2, being the primary construction project for about \$6.8 million that is in need of inspection services.
- **Pioneer Trail Pedestrian Improvements—Phase II.** This project will construct new sidewalks and pavement upgrades along Pioneer Trail between Larch Avenue and Ski Run Boulevard. It includes new sidewalks, ADA curb ramps, pedestrian lighting, and pavement rehabilitation. The project is expected to be awarded in February 2025 and will extend through the 2025 construction season. The estimated cost of the project is approximately \$6.8 million. This project is federally funded, and the inspector must have experience in managing and inspecting federally funded projects subject to LAPM requirements.

# INFO GATHERING



## Research client/project partner's website

Look for their mission statement and goals



## Use the RFP and project criteria to discern priorities



## Use the initial client meeting, pre-proposal meeting and / or walk-through as a resource

**Dig deeper with these questions** .....



### **QUESTIONS TO ANSWER:**

- Find out what their pain points and concerns are.
- Find out what their priorities are.
- Find out what they're excited about.
- If possible, also find out what their business goals are. Are they trying to increase revenue by expanding for example?

**So...how do we fold this  
into proposal writing?**

# Think like a journalist, *build your story*

**1.**

Establish  
your angle

**2.**

Gather  
information

**3.**

Write a  
strong lede

**4.**

Reel  
them in



**Questions**



# Proposal Writing Strategies

# TARGETED PROJECT WRITING

## Best Practice

**Write the full story as soon as the project is completed**

### ***WHAT SHOULD THE STORY INCLUDE?***

- **An introduction** incorporating interesting details.
- The **big ideas** that shaped the project.
- **Challenges and opportunities.**
- **Basic information** like square footage, estimated costs vs final costs (including change orders), etc.

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## Add Interest

### **Project Storytelling**



**NO**

This mixed-use affordable housing project is located on a five-acre site. The project includes 171 affordable apartments for the seniors, workforce, and houseless population and 22,000 sf of commercial space. The project was built in three phases, starting in December of 2017 and completing in May of 2023 on time and budget.



# TARGETED PROJECT WRITING

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**YES**

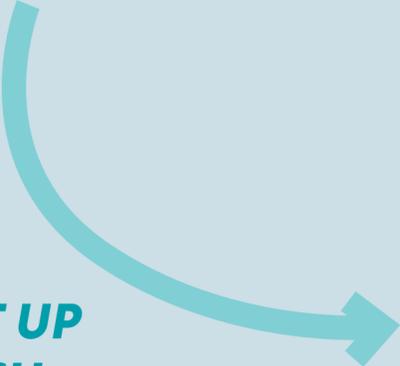
The development of the former Aloha Motel site on Samish Way was part of the City of Bellingham's vision to transform this austere section of the neighborhood into an urban village. An urban village's primary goal is to become less automobile focused by adding residential and mixed-use buildings, green spaces, and other features that support pedestrians and bicycles. In 2017, Bellingham Housing Authority (BHA) purchased the site and hired us to help them make this vision into a reality.

# TARGETED PROJECT WRITING

Best Practice

**Write the full story as soon as the project is completed**

*TAKE IT UP  
A NOTCH*



Best Practice

**Decide how you want to tell these stories in proposals**

***THEN WHAT?***

- Rewrite project sheets to align with their needs and scope (most time-consuming).
- Update sheets using Project Story relevancies.
- Highlight key qualifications with bullets or icons.
- Mix and match the above approaches.
- Select photos that reinforce your story.



**Questions**



# Proposal Writing Strategies

Fun with Resumes

# FUN WITH RESUMES

First things first...

## Primary elements of a bio

1.

Describe their **role** on the **project** in terms of **relevance**.

2.

Include a statement on **why they want to work on the project** (remember passion?).

3.

What **qualifications** will they bring to **set them apart** from every other person going after this job?

4.

Back up the bio with relevant project examples.

# FUN WITH RESUMES

Let's try something out

**Taking bios to the next level!**



*WRITING IS FUN!  
ALMOST AS FUN  
AS THIS LLAMA.*

## EXAMPLE

Prompt: Craft a bio for a proposal for a new transit center in a major city using the CM/GC delivery method with an emphasis on sustainability.

**The project criteria is for a PM with strong communication skills to assist the client with making transit accessible to everyone and a station design that creates public and user pride.**

# FUN WITH RESUMES

Let's try something out

**Taking bios to the next level!**



## UNDERWHELMING RESPONSE:

Karla has been working in the profession for 20 years. During that time, she has designed 15 transit centers. In her role as project manager for Community Transit, she will use her ability to communicate effectively with all team members to ensure a seamless process from start to completion. She will also facilitate design meetings, review cost estimates, and lead the subconsultant team.

## EXAMPLE

Prompt: Craft a bio for a proposal for a new transit center in a major city using the CM/GC delivery method with an emphasis on sustainability.

**The project criteria is for a PM with strong communication skills to assist the client with making transit accessible to everyone and a station design that creates public and user pride.**

# FUN WITH RESUMES

Let's try something out

**Taking bios to the next level!**



## PASSION-DRIVEN RESPONSE:

Karla has been working in the profession for 20 years. During that time, she has designed 15 transit centers in major cities using the CM/GC process. **She understands that these projects are an indispensable part of a strong community.** As a result, she endeavors to create transit environments that are rewarding and enriching for both employees and users. What she appreciates most is that they enhance communities by encouraging sustainable living and bringing people of all backgrounds together.

## EXAMPLE

Prompt: Craft a bio for a proposal for a new transit center in a major city using the CM/GC delivery method with an emphasis on sustainability.

**The project criteria is for a PM with strong communication skills to assist the client with making transit accessible to everyone and a station design that creates public and user pride.**

# FUN WITH RESUMES

And finally...

**Stick the landing!**



## FINISH WITH SKILLS & HOW:

Karla believes that establishing connections with people is what makes projects significant. **This attribute is beneficial to every project she works on because it enables the resolution of complex issues quickly and with consensus.**

## PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

QUALIFICATIONS, EXAMPLES, THEIR "WHY"

Karla has been working in the profession for 20 years. During that time, she has designed 15 transit centers in major cities using the CM/GC process.

**She understands that these projects are an indispensable part of a strong community.**

As a result, she endeavors to create transit environments that are rewarding and enriching for both employees and users. What she appreciates most is that they enhance communities by encouraging sustainable living and bringing people of all backgrounds together.

SKILLS & HOW

Karla believes that establishing connections with people is what makes projects significant. **This attribute is beneficial to every project she works on because it enables the resolution of complex issues quickly and with consensus.**

**An alternate approach**

**THE SO WHAT?**

***Test***

# “SO WHAT?” EXERCISE

## PROJECT:

A new transit center in a major city using the CM/GC delivery method with an emphasis on sustainability. **The project criteria is for a PM with strong communication skills to assist the client with making transit accessible to everyone and a station design that creates public and user pride.**

Opening

**Karla has been working in the profession for 20 years.**

# “SO WHAT?” EXERCISE

## PROJECT:

A new transit center in a major city using the CM/GC delivery method with an emphasis on sustainability. **The project criteria is for a PM with strong communication skills to assist the client with making transit accessible to everyone and a station design that creates public and user pride.**

Opening

**Karla has been working in the profession for 20 years.**

**BIO BUILDING**



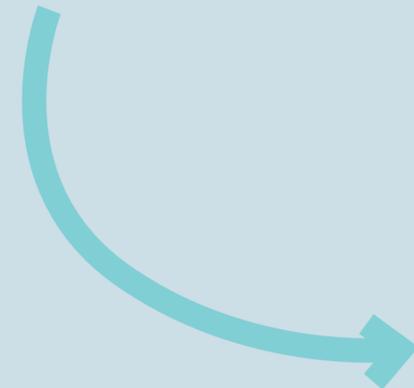
**SO WHAT?**

**During that time, she has designed 15 transit centers.**

# “SO WHAT?” EXERCISE

Opening

**Karla has been working in the profession for 20 years.**



**BIO BUILDING**

During that time, she has designed 15 transit centers.



**SO WHAT?**

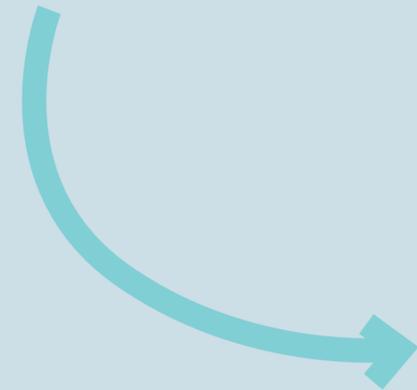


**They have been in major cities using the CM/GC project delivery method like this one.**

# “SO WHAT?” EXERCISE

Opening

**Karla has been working in the profession for 20 years.**



**BIO BUILDING**

During that time, she has designed 15 transit centers.

They have been in major cities using the CM/GC project delivery method like this one.

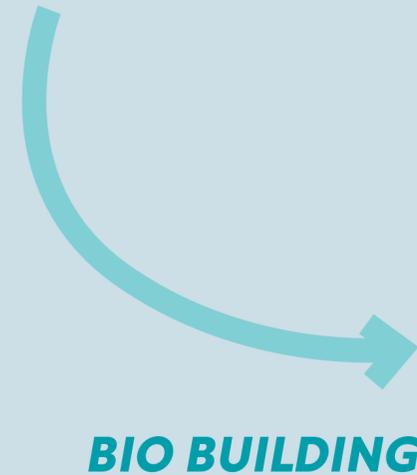
**SO WHAT?**

**She has learned that these projects are an indispensable part of a strong community.**

# “SO WHAT?” EXERCISE

Opening

**Karla has been working in the profession for 20 years.**



During that time, she has designed 15 transit centers.

They have been in major cities using the CM/GC project delivery method like this one.

She has learned that these projects are an indispensable part of a strong community.

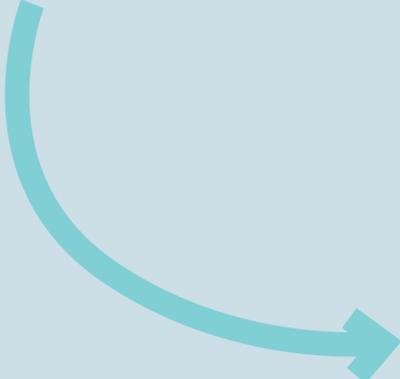
**SO WHAT?**

**As a result, she endeavors to create transit environments that are rewarding and enriching for both employees and users.**

# “SO WHAT?” EXERCISE

Opening

**Karla has been working in the profession for 20 years.**



*TIE IT BACK TO THE PASSION FOR THE PROJECT*

During that time, she has designed 15 transit centers.

They have been in major cities using the CM/GC project delivery method like this one.

She has learned that these projects are an indispensable part of a strong community.

As a result, she endeavors to create transit environments that are rewarding and enriching for both employees and users.

**BRINGING IT HOME TO THEM**

**What she appreciates most is that they enhance communities by encouraging sustainable living and bringing people of all backgrounds together.**

# “SO WHAT?” EXERCISE

Opening

**Karla has been working in the profession for 20 years.**



**BUILD A STRONG CLOSING**

**CLOSING**

**In her role as project manager for Community Transit, she will use her ability to communicate effectively with all team members to ensure a seamless process from start to completion.**

**SO WHAT?**

**Karla believes that establishing connections with people is what makes projects significant.**

**SO WHAT?**

**This attribute is beneficial to every project she works on because it enables the resolution of complex issues quickly and with consensus.**

**Ah ha!**

Let's see it all together!

# “SO WHAT?” EXERCISE

## PROJECT:

A new transit center in a major city using the CM/GC delivery method with an emphasis on sustainability. **The project criteria is for a PM with strong communication skills to assist the client with making transit accessible to everyone and a station design that creates public and user pride.**

**REDEVELOPED  
BIO**

### **INTRO**

**Karla has been working in the profession for 20 years. During that time, she has designed 15 transit centers in major cities using the CM/GC process. She understands that these projects are an indispensable part of a strong community. As a result, she endeavors to create transit environments that are rewarding and enriching for both employees and users.**

### **PASSION FOR THE PROJECT**

**What she appreciates most is that they enhance communities by encouraging sustainable living and bringing people of all backgrounds together.**

### **CLOSING WITH SKILLS & HOW**

**Karla believes that establishing connections with people is what makes projects significant. This attribute is beneficial to every project she works on because it enables the resolution of complex issues quickly and with consensus.**

# 30-50% GRAPHICS RULE

**1**  
Engage Leadership so they will lead by example.

**2**  
Make it part of the culture.

**3**  
Create a change in mindset through training.

**4**  
Start with inclusion and diversity initiatives within your

**5**  
Involve people and listen.

## Approaches Suggested by the Group:

- 1. Engage Leadership** so they will lead by example.
- 2. Make it part of the culture.** It requires a culture shift. Focus on core values. Making DEIB part of the culture without using those words. Simplify it by using words like "core values", "respect", and "teamwork".
- 3. Create a change in mindset through training:** Discipline or teachable moment? Try focusing on teachable moments for bullying, micro-aggressions that turns into racism. Instead of terminating the individual, invest with a consultant to provide training and support. A common challenge on job sites is that foremen may lack the knowledge or skills necessary to effectively manage communication and establish ground rules.
- 4. Start with inclusion and diversity initiatives within your office,** as it is likely to have a more diverse pool of individuals who can help establish a network of connections through friends and family.
- 5. Involve people and listen.** For example, one of the larger organizations used the Building Bridges program, which is dialogue for change — is mostly done on the office side. They have had great participation, created a safe space, used panelists of employees sharing personal experiences, and it has been very powerful. They start with community norms.



Photo courtesy of Holmberg



Photo courtesy of McKinstry

## POSSIBLE 1-PAGE CONTENT LAYOUT



**CATET EAQUODIT QUAS NAT ALIQUO IL ESSIN**

Cus es enim nam, omnihic aborerum venieni hillest, cus aut que et rae venim imus quat volupti onsequibus. Ommolup ienimus, simuscus eossi teceriere, sequiducil minci cot eos accatiam, sae seque omnihil ipsum quam vit rat eum et facearibus autem dit as experum quaernatur, volorro et res maxim volorep erumquo cones ne pe nos eossimi nverum ratur.

Ronto Magnat Que  
Volorpor Same Provit

**KUS AUT ET LA COREST, SE OMNIS NONSECTE NONSE MAIOREHENDAE**

Voluptat oditio. Aribeatem exero con reiur re maximin tiissit iatem. Od ea incius etur aut la dolest laniam entota acculluptis moluptioris ditatiis que volupta sae nest, ut dolupta nus adi doluptae ea voluptate pedia coria sam, omnimus mint.

Entur raest aciis non consedit, commos nis sunt ex es nobit faces acium aut laborios quam quae vollaborum haritatessit volupti bereped eos aut molupti rectat.

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POSSIBLE 1-PAGE CONTENT LAYOUT 7

# 30-50% GRAPHICS RULE

## A SOLUTION-CENTRIC TEAM

### The G3 Team

At G3, we're experts in technically challenging work, mindful of coordination within critical and occupied environments, and adept at maintaining operations when necessary.

Our specialized, flexible, hands-on team approach sets us apart. You can trust that we will be your dedicated, collaborative partner—committed to achieving each and every goal you set from project conception to completion and beyond.

### G3 Team Highlights

**14**  
AVERAGE YEARS  
OF CONSTRUCTION  
EXPERIENCE

**.7200**  
2024 EMR

### THE G3 WAY



DETAIL-ORIENTED



DEDICATED



CREATIVE



DEPENDABLE

### OUR TEAM

#### Project Managers & Coordinators



Jessica



Reed



Ryan



Alex



Michael



Aaron



Taylor

#### Site Superintendents & Foreman

## Section 4

Proposal pages with quote examples

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Person, Title, Company



Caption Goes Here

// AUBURN MECHANICAL NAME OF PROJECT GOES HERE



# Parting Thoughts



## **Your hidden job is to:**

**Find the story amidst the words and devise the best way to convey it to all types of readers. (Especially for the skimmers)**

***“Architecture is like writing.  
You have to edit it over and over  
again so it looks effortless.”***

***- Zaha Hadid***



**Questions**

# THE SH(ORT)LIST

all things  
AEC  
marketing



check out our podcast!



## THANK YOU!

**Julie Flattery, Affiliate AIA**

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MIDDLE *of* SIX