



What Services Am I Getting?

An Introduction to Scope Gap

Overview

Architectural services broadly include the design and documentation of buildings, infrastructure, and other physical structures. Each unique project will include its own distinct scope of services required to achieve the result. Unintentionally and despite all involved parties' best efforts, there often exists what is known as "scope gap" between the intended design and the outcome.

In the world of architecture, a scope gap occurs when there is a mismatch between the intended design of a project and its outcome. Scope gaps can occur for a variety of reasons including changes to or lack of clarity in the project's requirements, unexpected events during the construction process, or incorrect interpretation of the design specifications. For example, a client might expect to begin building a project because an architect produced a zoning plan that met with the proper municipal approval; however, due to a miscommunication between the architect and the client, the client is unaware that further documentation needs to be completed before construction can begin.

Causes and Impacts of Scope Gap

A successful project takes root in effective communication between architects, clients, and contractors. Poor communication between the parties involved can lead to

an incorrect interpretation of the design specifications which may result in unexpected change orders during construction. Should a client change their minds about the project design, the original design specifications can change. Additionally, circumstances such as the discovery of unexpected obstacles or limitations may arise during construction that dictate necessary design changes. While these are just a few examples of what can initiate scope gap, the real beast is in how scope gap affects a project overall.

The impacts of scope gap can be far reaching and are not always discoverable from a project's outset. Most notably and feared, design changes can affect the overall project budget. A delay in issuing design documents can push back the opportunity to purchase materials at lower prices, while modifying or adding to the design can increase not only the architectural budget but the overall construction budget. Changes to the intended design can also have a negative impact on the functionality or look of the final product, which can create dissatisfaction among clients. Alternatively, the scope gap may affect the overall quality of the project resulting in poor workmanship or lower quality materials. Sometimes the scope gap results in changes to the project timeline which can create a completion delay that may result in additional material costs, extended loan fees, or longer temporary utility needs.

Preventing Scope Gap

So, what can design professionals, developers, and contractors do to prevent the scope gap? Clearly defining the scope of work and design specifications for a project can go a long way in preventing scope gap. Finetuning the design and budget during the design phase will give a much clearer picture of the final product. Consistent, logical communication between clients, architects, and contractors will help reduce misunderstandings about the original design. Along the same line, by regularly communicating, everyone involved will be better able to identify possible constraints and create plans to address them. The use of technology and prototypes can also assist in reducing scope gap by giving opportunities to visualize the final design before construction begins.

In 2022, 52% of projects completed experienced uncontrolled changes to the project's scope according to PMI

Conclusion

While the scope gap can have significant impacts on a project, knowing that scope gap exists goes a long way in preventing the harm it causes. Defining a project's goals, refining the program and design, and having a clear idea of the end result can reduce the possibility of a scope gap. While scope gap in architecture is a complex issue, collaboration, communication, and early identification of potential issues can minimize the scope gap and ensure a more successful, higher-quality project for architects, clients, and contractors.

Contact JLS Architects to learn more and see what's right for your project.

Citations

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"What is Scope Gap?" (Write, 2023)

Image: Andrew Lozovyi, *Cropped Shot of Couple Using Laptop While making Renovation of Home* (DepositPhotos, 2018).