

Early Contractor Involvement

The need to stimulate collaboration in the preparation of large, complex construction projects

May 2026

The European Federation of Engineering Consultancy Associations (EFCA) has member associations in 27 countries, representing more than 10,000 companies from the European engineering consultancy industry and related fields. Based in Brussels, EFCA is committed to facilitating constructive dialogue with European Institutions on issues impacting our industry; and engaging with international stakeholders on shared interests.

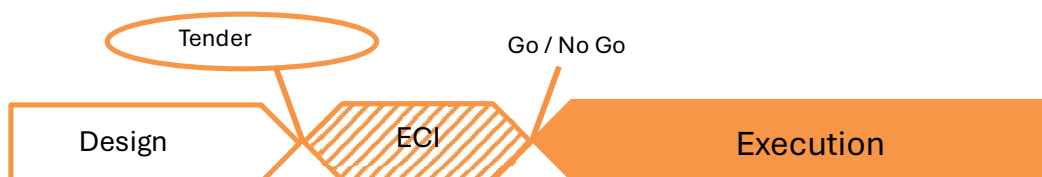
Collaboration

In a fast-changing world, the construction industry faces many challenges as a consequence of the energy transition, climate change, the need to replace and renovate infrastructure, as well as the ageing population and the increasing (skilled) labour shortage. One way to address these challenges is to *collaborate in the preparation* and execution of construction projects. Collaboration can lead to a more efficient construction process, better risk management and faster delivery. The core of collaborative contracts lies in a preparatory phase in which the client, engineers, and contractor work together in one, integral team.

Early Contractor Involvement

Collaboration can be achieved through “Early Contractor Involvement (ECI)”, a setting in which client, engineers and contractor work together in the design phase before going to the construction phase. Therefore, *ECI works explicitly in the preparation phase of projects*. EFCA promotes a balanced setting, where the contractor is invited to join the design team, bringing in its expertise and knowledge about constructability and risks in the execution phase. During the ECI phase, *the engineers stay in the lead*, work on the design and remain responsible for the design. The client has the intention of reaching an agreement with the contractor and has to agree on a price for the execution.

In order to achieve the maximum output from ECI, the engineers should remain involved in the execution phase. In this way, the right application of agreed methods and measures is ensured.



Application of Early Contractor Involvement

Not all projects need Early Contractor Involvement. ECI is not an easy setting in terms of project management, liability and price process, and will only pay out if there is an extra added value to collaborate in the preparation of the project.

When to use ECI?

Thus, there needs to be an *explicit reason* for the use of ECI. A first reason for ECI could be the expected large size and complexity of the execution process, which makes it valuable to attract the knowledge on constructability in the preparation phase of the project. This complexity can be technical, in terms of the scope of the project, but also regarding the way in which the project has to be executed. A second reason can be the need for innovation in sustainability or circularity. New ideas and concepts are developed by engineers and other creative minds, but these also need to be taken to delivery. Collaboration between engineers and contractors can add value and increase output. A third reason for ECI could be the explicit need for a very secured, predictable execution phase, without disruption or surprises.

Conditions for the use of ECI

ECI is complex in terms of liability and ability to collaborate in projects, so it usually works in countries with a *strong legal & administrative system* that favours a transparent collaboration, based on trust between private and public entities. ECI will work properly with strong, decisive and knowledgeable contracting authorities that are willing and capable to play an active role in the ECI phase.

A second condition is that ECI should be used on *mature and complex projects of a certain size*. Only then will the extra investment in the preparation phase pay out, later in the project.

Furthermore, careful timing of the contractor's participation is an important condition for a successful output of ECI. In general, this means that the added value is maximised when the ECI phase starts *once the project is well defined in scope, risks and technical requirements*.

Expected outcomes of Early Contractor Involvement

Better collaboration in the preparation of projects can lead to *more predictability and less changes* in the execution phase, an obvious advantage for all participants and stakeholders, as the unexpected changes in the execution phase lead to changes in planning and costs. Stakeholders eventually face the resulting negative consequences, such as later delivery, increased spending, traffic disruptions and more noise. Specifically in cases where the execution process poses complexity, ECI can create added value. If applied in the right setting, ECI can give *beneficial outcomes* for the economy, climate, environment and the public, as well as for the consulting engineers and contractors alike.

Innovation in sustainability and circularity can be positively stimulated by collaboration between engineers and contractors, making the "construction ecosystem" more attractive to young talent.

In addition, ECI also leads to a *better transfer of information* from the preparation phase to the execution phase by providing the executing company with enough time to get to know the project, as well as explore and de-risk, as compared to any other contract models.

The role of EFCA

As engineers have the right knowledge and competence and are at the centre of the design process, they are therefore key players in the development of any policy framework on ECI. Represented in Brussels, EFCA can offer its expertise to the sector and the EU institutions, to ensure that the application of ECI can indeed create extra value and contribute to the answers on the challenges that we face in Europe.

For further information, contact Sue Arundale, Director General, efca@efca.be