

ONEder Grant Program to Inspire Innovation in Architecture and Design

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Image Courtesy of Sven Mieke

By [Meghan Hall](#)

Technology hubs like the San Francisco Bay Area have a well-established reputation for innovation, while others, such as the Puget Sound, are only just beginning to experience that growth for themselves. Innovation and creativity have occurred across a wide variety of sectors: technology, life sciences, and biomedical. However, those at One Workplace, a commercial office dealership, wanted that inventive reputation to extend to architecture and design firms as well, many of whom help to imagine spaces for the regions' most creative companies. The result was the ONEder Grant program, which strives to encourage innovation specifically within the architecture and design community.

"We started ONEder Grant a little over a year ago, and we asked ourselves the question: what is it the design community needs from us?" explained Dave Bryant, vice president of sales One Workplace. "We gave ourselves permission to stop and say, 'How did we get here?'"

Bryant noted that while there has been innovation over the years in the architecture and design community, who has the time—and money—to pursue research has continued to evolve over the years. The design community's role in commercial real estate has become one in which often only the largest firms with the most resources had time to undertake extra projects.

"Our world within the ecosystem of commercial real estate has really been commoditized, and what dawned on us is that designers and architects have been commoditized as well," said Bryant. "Historically, a customer would have—even before hiring a broker—hired an architect and designer to share their

dreams and aspirations. What's happened now is that project management is more involved, and so [architects and designers] are being asked to give an RFP and commoditize their pricing. It is having to be more competitive and bid for work, which is very different than before."

These types of processes and deal structure means that design focus can be pulled away from the heart of the project, with more emphasis and energy placed on budget guidelines and timelines.

"The real estate community is really missing the value that architects and designers bring because everything is so driven by billable hours and billable hours against what your bid was, that there is less time—unless you are a major firm—to really take time to create points of view and thought leadership and research," Bryant added.

At the time that the idea ONEder Grant came about, One Workplace was looking to hire a headcount in Silicon Valley that included a traditional architecture and design-oriented candidate, one who would work to manage key relationships firm, both internally and externally. ONEder Grant arose out of the impetus to do something different with the funds, as opposed to hiring a new employee.

"We are living in Silicon Valley, where arguably the greatest thought leadership relative to technology and the coming trends of tech and tech development happen, and yet design firms in this area are the ones that are designing those spaces," emphasized Bryant. "... If we truly are committed to supporting the design community and what they really need, which is helping them de-commoditize themselves and be seen as critical within real estate, perhaps we have an opportunity to put our money where our mouth is and fund grants...to develop those points of view."

One Workplace test piloted the program in the South Bay for its first year, reaching out to about 16 firms and receiving eight applications for grants. Three ONEder grants were issued. The first went to HPS a small firm who evaluated the effectiveness of decision-making tools in reducing carbon footprints. The second went to HGA, who examined how a new design approach can amplify the voices of facilities teams and technology engineers during the design process. The third grant was awarded to HPC, who produced research on immerse visual communication technologies, and whether VR, AR and MR can improve participation in the design process.

All of the submissions, said Bryant, were incredibly unique. The only true criteria applicants needed to adhere to was to ensure that their research produced a tangible deliverable that could be widely useful across the architecture and design industries.

"It would be pretty disingenuous for us to ask for a research topic if that wasn't something the firm was interested in," said Bryant. "[But] one key factor that we said, was that we believed the architecture and design community needed to come together and create a community of thought leadership...The research needed to benefit the greater good, not just one particular firm."

Now, with the first round of grant research completed, One Workplace is looking to kick off a second round of ONEder Grants for 2020. One Workplace can fund up to six \$20,000 grants this year. Grant applications are due July 22, 2020, the firm has expanded the program to the greater San Francisco Bay Area and Sacramento, with potential plans to perhaps expand to Seattle in the future. Over the past year, One Workplace has acquired OpenSquare, a workplace solutions company.

“It is really important to our organization that we share ideas and best practices, and so we do have plans to expand beyond the Bay Area, and are giving support to OpenSquare as much as they would like to consider having it in their market,” said Bryant. “There seems to be a great deal of interest. It is important that we are funding research in markets where we have business.”

It is unclear when the ONEder Grant program would be rolled out elsewhere, but Bryant added that the program remains an important part of One Workplace’s strategy to improve on its solutions for customers and the architecture and design community at large.

“At One Workplace we really have this spirit of constructive discontent...we have been blessed to have a pretty successful business history,” said Bryant. “We have never rested on our laurels, and we are constantly challenging ourselves to think differently.”

