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IACCA PERSPECTIVES

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Conference Center
Administration
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Briefing Papers

Site and Facility Management

New Lenses on Site and Facility Management

By Wynne Whyman

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

30 years for IACCA. A celebration!

As IACCA celebrates its 30th anniversary, the 2006 annual conference focused on Emerging Trends. Conference leaders in IACCA want to be on the cutting edge, recognizing the demands of progress and change. *-IACCA conference brochure*

This article summarizes the interactive workshop I presented, *New Lenses on Site and Facility Management*. It also includes the points the participants made during the session and information from my upcoming 2007 book, *Outdoor Site and Facility Management*.

Introduction

To share information and to help the audience begin thinking about the topic, fourteen different issues were presented using graphics and data in a PowerPoint show. During each point, there were questions, discussion, and sharing of ideas. Topics included site, facility, people, and other. After the presentation, participants were asked use a 5-point Likert scale to indicate the attention that was needed for twenty-four items: a dot for five years ago and another dot for today. Eleven people participated, and a handful of people graciously said their position or newness might influence the data and chose not to participate. The large group, then split into two groups to discuss their top areas.

STAY MISSION FOCUSED

As you look at this information, you need to keep your mission, vision and values of the organization paramount. All site and facility discussions, decisions, and changes must be aligned with the work you do at your center. The mission statement is your litmus test to determine whether trends resulting in changes make sense for your operation; the boundaries of services provided for guests; and the culture that permeates staff, volunteers, and guests daily.

Key Lense #1 – **Technology Design, Use and Maintenance**

Key Lense #2 – **Utilities**

Key Lense #3 – **Security**

Key Lense #4 – **High Performing Property Department**

Key Lense #5 – **Natural Resources**

AREA 1: TECHNOLOGY DESIGN, USE AND MAINTENANCE

First, the Internet was the area that had the highest amount of change, from five years ago to today. Technology affects all parts of our lives, and conference centers are no exception.

- © **MISSION.** Determine for your center, how does “being connected” support or detract from your mission? One conference center has put TVs in all the rooms. Another has separated the conference center (with technology) and the retreat center (without technology). What makes sense for your mission? Can you succinctly articulate how the use and accessibility of technology supports your mission?

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New Lenses on Site and Facility Management

- ◎ **GUEST NEEDS.** Ask the guests informally and perhaps on their checkout evaluations about their needs. There are usually several solutions, which may or may not include individual guest access to technology. For example, if guests simply want a weather report, can you easily post morning and afternoon weather updates in a prominent location?
- ◎ **STAFFING.** Depending on the size of the center, its mission, and the type of technologies used, you will need different staffing. You'll also need to determine how important it is to have skills in-house for guest and staff support. As technology continues to change, you may need to send a staff person to training, find skilled volunteers, work with your associated organizations, or intentionally split the responsibilities with staff and an outside vendor.
- ◎ **GUEST KNOWLEDGE.** Do guests know before they arrive what technology, for their group and as individuals, will be available? Your website and promotional, paper-based materials are excellent places to include this information. Look at how you have included:
 - The technology available/not available. Include cell phone coverage, public computer availability, wireless availability, AV equipment.
 - A statement about the use of technology in congruence with the mission. Is it "state of the art" or "a place for personal growth - away from the distractions..."
- ◎ **TECHNOLOGY CONTINUES TO CHANGE AND ADVANCE.** Look to see that you have funds budgeted each year to continually update your equipment. Secondly, work with your accountant, because your depreciation schedule for some pieces of equipment may be longer than your actual life expectancy. For example, a computer may be depreciated for five years, but yet you replace your computers every three years.

AREA 2: UTILITIES

The rising cost of utilities, particularly electricity and heating fuel, is the top area for conference centers to address. As taught in the facilities KCW, utilities is one area that you can make changes.

- ◎ **PLAN FOR CELEBRATION.** Before making plans and implementing changes, baseline the current techniques and costs you are incurring. Of course, you'll have a good record keeping system in place! Then later, you have the data to "wow" people and celebrate.
- ◎ **ANALYZE THE PROBLEM AREAS AND GRADUALLY PHASE IN SOLUTIONS.** You can do a lot yourself, but remember to fully utilize the expertise in your community. The county government, state government, utility companies, or energy

conservation organizations can help you determine problem areas and possible solutions. They often have calculated breakeven points for installing different fixtures or using different techniques. As areas are maintained or replaced, you can gradually make changes. Examples include: adding insulation, using compact florescent light bulbs (where appropriate), checking for supply line leaks, changing T-12 florescent lights to T-8, using ENERGY STAR® LED lighting for exits, etc.

- ◎ **INCLUDE, INFORM, AND EDUCATE GUESTS IN YOUR PLAN.** Ideas include sharing your commitment to the earth, stewardship of resources, and specific activities a guest can do while they are visiting. Example: "\$x.xx of your overnight fee goes towards utilities. Please turn off lights and keep the heating/air conditioning at ___ degrees. This helps our environment and keeping our costs down."
- ◎ **PHASE IN GREEN BUILDING TECHNIQUES AND GREEN PRODUCTS.** While it can be easier to implement green building techniques to additions or new construction, there are several techniques that can be implemented, such as low-flow showerheads, on-demand hot water heaters, etc.

AREA 3: SECURITY

Since security was an above average concern, one of the breakout groups discussed and reported techniques to the rest of the group: gates, cams, signage, uniformed security presence, key to room, and staff on-site.

Some additional comments:

- ◎ **YOUR SECURITY PLAN NEEDS TO BE IN ALIGNMENT WITH YOUR MISSION STATEMENT.** Your security plan needs to send a message of safety and protection to your guests, and at the same time your center needs to extend a warm hand of hospitality. Your center is the one that can best determine the balance that is needed.
- ◎ **REVIEW YOUR SECURITY PLAN WITH THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND NEIGHBORS.** Keep up to date with the plans, techniques, and events in your community.
- ◎ **CENTER'S PHONE NUMBER.** Little things matter. Make your center's contact phone number easily accessible to the families and friends of guests who are staying with you. While most guests bring their cell phone with them, it brings peace of mind for all to know there are backup numbers easily accessible, in case a cell phone is not answered.
- ◎ **CONNECTION TO THE WORLD.** Recent national and local events have changed how guests may want to be connected while they are at your center. During their stay, some guests want to have immediate access, while others are comfortable removing themselves from the world - knowing that the center staff will inform them of any major event. How do you communicate your approach to your guests? How do you staff stay current, so they are also not isolated?

New Lenses on Site and Facility Management

AREA 4: HIGH PERFORMING PROPERTY DEPARTMENT

Participants identified that they need to have a high performing property department. A property department needs to wear multiple hats in the type of work they do: proactive, reactive, and focus on the future. Some of the questions you might ask yourself are:

- ⊙ When hiring and evaluating performance, what skills are essential, and what skills can be learned on-the-job? While a perfect person is always sought, that's rarely the reality. Sorting out what is needed for your operation is essential for someone to be successful. See page 167, Appendix H, "Using Mapping During The Interview Process" in *Planning Guide for Maintaining School Facilities* for a technique to use during interviewing. Once you have the staff in place, you can integrate the work with volunteers and outside contractors.
- ⊙ Job performance expectations. What is the level of service, maintenance, and custodial efforts you for your center? For example, see p. 82 *Planning Guide for Maintaining School Facilities* for five levels of custodial cleaning. While this is geared towards schools, you can make a similar chart for your facility and the level of custodial work needed for different areas, using your square footage.
- ⊙ How will property staff stay current and have training opportunities? Examine what local workshops are available, if there is time during a person's day to access information on the web, and the availability of online courses.
- ⊙ How do you know you have the right number of staff? There is no magic formula, but you can look at your indicators to tell whether all proactive and reactive jobs are regularly getting done.
- ⊙ Does your staff have the tools and equipment to do their job? You can invest a small fortune, so you'll need to determine ways that you can rent or borrow infrequently used tools. You also want to avoid staff using their own tools equipment, unless they are adequately compensated.

AREA 5: NATURAL RESOURCES

With urban sprawl, encroachment, and changing public values, how centers manage their site is also changing. Whether seventeen acres or several hundred acres, many organizations consider the outdoor experience a critical part of their program and make it part of their mission and values statements. Staff, board members, property committee members, volunteers, community members, and other stakeholders hold varying views of land and natural resource management. Some maintain a hands-off policy, believing that people interfering with natural processes is

never an appropriate choice. Others take a conservative approach: manage a little bit, see how it goes, then maybe manage a little more. Yet others believe in taking an aggressive approach. It should come as no surprise that providing education and managing differences of opinion will be part of your task. A collaborative, consensus building process is needed to align all parties on a proper site management strategy.

Your job is to make sure the organization maintains a quality outdoor setting, by developing an overall management philosophy, communicating the philosophy to become engrained in all work, and working to ensure the work is done and on track.

CONCLUSION

Site and facility management is on-going and change is constant. Thus it is important that you and your staff keep aligned with your mission statement, stay up-to-date with knowledge and what is happening in your local community, and leverage your knowledgeable IACCA network.

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Summary from participant input, IACCA workshop, Nov 2006

	Today	Change from 5 Years Ago
Rising utility costs	4.5	1.3
High performing property department	4.1	1.1
Internet, accessibility of data to public and guests	3.9	2.0
Property staff—having the right skills	3.8	1.2
Property Staff - being fully staffed	3.8	1.1
Resources—having tools, vehicles, equipment to do job	3.8	1.2
Strategic plan—needing a plan	3.7	0.9
Natural resource management (trees, grasses, rivers)	3.6	1.1

1=none, 2=little, 3=some, 4=moderate, 5=significant

Note: the averages are approximate, as interpretation was used to determine the nearest half point value of the dot locations.

About the Author

Wynne Whyman is president of Callippe Solutions, LLC. Involved in camping for more than twenty years, her positions include counselor, administrator, property director, board member, and long-range planning chair. Wynne conducts workshops, teaches the facilities KCW, has published six articles, and her site/facility management book will be published next year.

As an educator, Wynne draws upon her diverse experiences including facilitation, mathematics, leadership development, and technology.



New Lenses on Site and Facility Management

SUMMARY FROM THE CAMP MAINTENANCE CONFERENCE, MARCH 2006.

57 returned surveys from primarily camp maintenance staff. Their top areas of concern from the question "What are your challenges in site/facility management" are:

1. Monies-expansion
2. Monies-operations
3. Rising utility costs
4. Resources-tool, vehicles, equipment

It is interesting to note the similarities and differences with the findings. Camps are different than centers, the questions asked were slightly different, and there are different staff positions answering the questions.

RESOURCES

CompassPoint Nonprofit Services. A nonprofit training, consulting and research organization. Has an electronic newsletter, Board Café, for members of nonprofit boards of directors. Short enough to read over a cup of coffee, Board Café offers a menu of ideas, information, opinion, news, and resources to help board members give and get the most out of board service. <http://www.boardcafe.org>

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U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003. National Forum on Education Statistics. *Planning Guide for Maintaining School Facilities*, NCES 2003-347, prepared by T. Szuba, R. Young, and the School Facilities Maintenance Task Force. Washington, DC. <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2003/2003347.pdf>

Custodial ratios, p. 82.

Mapping during the interview process, p 167

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About IACCA

The International Association of Conference Center Administrators (IACCA) is an association of nonprofit conference center professionals committed to education, professionalism, and support.

1. IACCA offers educational opportunities for its members and for those with whom they work.
2. IACCA promotes professional excellence in nonprofit conference center leadership, administration, and operation.
3. IACCA provides a supportive community that facilitates the sharing of knowledge and experience and the addressing of common challenges.