

Don't Reinvent the Wheel



Washington's POS Consortium Is Useful Tool for Colleges and Universities

by Phil Partington

Since 1996, the State of Washington has realized the benefits of the Plant Operations Support (POS) Consortium, designed to unite isolated public facilities managers. The POS Consortium now comprises more than 750 facility professionals in various roles. This self-sustaining, government program combines technology and operational services to enhance public facilities stewardship and serves as “resource central” for solutions and opportunities. The primary goal of the program continues to be finding ways to utilize public sector expertise and resources to extend the “lives” of tax-supported facilities and save dollars. Consortium staff coordinate, link, broker, research, and facilitate the various issues and requests of its members.

On any given day, staff will field requests from members looking for surplus furniture, equipment or materials; serve as construction/project managers; research solutions to physical plant problems; respond to on-site assessment requirements or locate hard-to-find, outdated system components.

More than 2,000 requests for assistance are received each year, resulting in more than \$17 million in avoided costs and outright resource savings since 1996. A number of colleges

and universities belong to this novel “family” of public facilities managers, including the University of Washington, Evergreen State College, and Washington State University.

Jerri McCray, associate vice president for the University of Washington, calls the Consortium “a real success story. It’s a best practice approach to carrying out the mandate of the state, focusing on resource sharing, while helping others with a commitment of teamwork and partnership for quality outcomes,” she said.

The Consortium

POS invites any public agency to join the Consortium. In order to remain a self-sustaining program, POS requests a tuition fee determined after assessing the size and number of operational sites of the facility. POS offers this guarantee: “If you don’t receive full value from the program, we’ll extend your membership free until you do.” In nearly seven years of business, POS has never had to make good on that guarantee, but instead has saved its members two to five times the amount of their tuition—usually in just one transaction.

The benefits enjoyed by Consortium members are unlimited. The Evergreen State College (TESC), a four-year public institution and long-time Consortium member, realized some considerable savings while responding to recent Consortium offerings. Professionals from the college’s child care center jumped at the opportunity to secure a number of rubber playground pads from another Consortium member in 2003. The pads were offered to members for the cost of hauling them away—quite a value for a tightly-budgeted facility.

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Facilities maintenance professionals from TESC took full advantage of another Consortium salvage/reuse opportunity last month by securing a number of air conditioning and mechanical systems from the State Capitol building in Olympia. The Capitol is undergoing extensive renovation and the existing air handling and air conditioning systems would have been removed and disposed of by the general contractor.

"This was an outstanding opportunity for the college to secure much-needed equipment in an economical way, while practicing sustainable operations," said Sekeli Manu, college HVAC supervisor. "We've gotten our value from the Consortium times five with this one transaction."

POS staff has accumulated an extensive shared collection of lessons learned by others in the facility management business. An electronic discussion list allows members to advertise surplus or salvage items, solve problems, answer questions, and simply learn from each other's experiences. Additionally, when members contact POS staff with a research request, they are assured that a knowledgeable staff member will immediately begin work on the challenge or issue. The staff member will gather necessary information to answer the request in short order, saving the requesting member time.

The POS program also offers professional development opportunities to members at no cost. Semi-annual videoconferences and intermittent workshops keep members up-to-date on the newest happenings in facilities maintenance and operations. Mo Hollman, associate senior vice president for facilities management services at University of Southern California, and Alan Bigger, director of building services at the University of Notre Dame, were featured presenters at a Consortium videoconference last year.

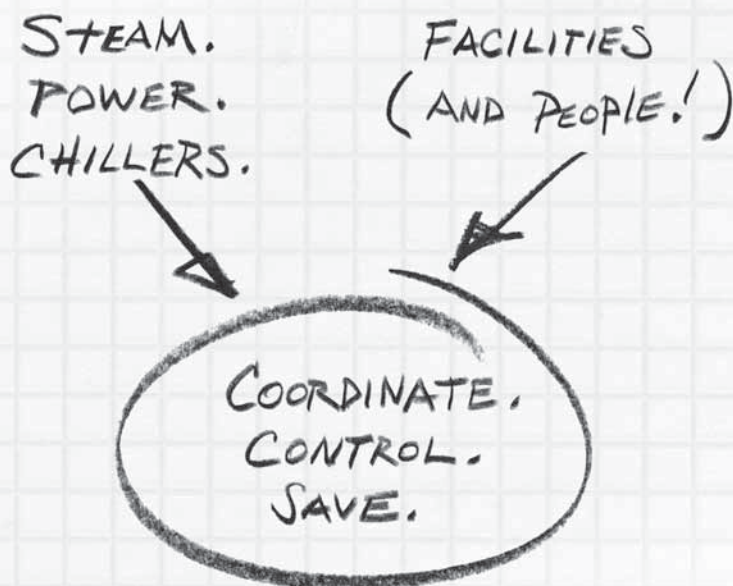
The POS website offers useful facilities-related data. The site, www.ga.wa.gov/plant, also provides links to programs and other sustainable operations sites where members can obtain surplus or salvage materials for free or nearly free. Links to other Consortium member sites and professional organizations are also provided. Finally, POS publishes a quarterly online newsletter, *Shop Talk*, which spotlights members using best practices and/or innovative

practices, shares ingenious ideas, and showcases new products.

"With the consortium, there are always quality outcomes. Someone is always getting something," says McCray. "We work like teams and in partnerships in order to mitigate the challenges of our operations. The more we can share resources, the more effective we can be." 🏢

For additional information about the Plant Operations Support Consortium, contact Bob MacKenzie at 360-902-7257 or bmacken@ga.wa.gov.

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