

Professional Development Through APPA's Facilities Management Evaluation Program

By E. Lander Medlin

In a striking metaphor, the French philosopher Antoine de St. Exupery wrote: "If you want to build a ship, don't drum up men to go to the forest to gather wood, saw it, and nail planks together. Instead, teach them a desire for the sea." This is exactly what APPA offers its qualified evaluators who provide an institutional assessment utilizing APPA's Facilities Management Evaluation Program (FMEP) review criteria. By becoming a qualified FMEP evaluator, they understand what comprises an excellent facilities organization. The evaluator gains an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the seven-section criteria and its 57 subsections, which are all part of an integrated system to optimize organizational performance. These criteria not only provide a tool for organizational continuous improvement, they serve as a compelling leadership development tool essential for today's facilities management professional.

The facilities management profession has become more complex than ever before and the challenges of meeting—better yet, exceeding—customer demands 24/7 seem daunting at times. We are living in an environment of increasingly, if not rapidly, diminishing resources that will require our best efforts to do our work as efficiently and effectively as possible. And we need not only to do things right, but consistently and predictably to do the right things.

The problems surrounding our institutions and the facilities organizations themselves are mounting and we must be part of the solution. This will require increased levels of productivity and accountability that are in alignment with the institution's vision, mission, and strategy. Ernest Boyer (a former higher education institution president) once

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stated, "Good facilities are essential to good learning." Therefore, as leaders in educational facilities, it is incumbent upon us to demonstrate that enhanced facilities positively impact the retention and recruitment of students and faculty. Assessing how a facilities organization measures up is captured in the FMEP set of criteria. Whether engaging in a formal FMEP or not, utilizing this set of criteria for developing strategic action plans and annual assessments is critical.

THE FMEP – A CUSTOMIZED EVALUATION

So what is a FMEP and what does it seek to achieve? The APPA FMEP is a

comprehensive evaluation of the quality of the facilities organization and its delivery systems at educational institutions performed by high quality educational facilities professionals. Thus, the FMEP provides institutions with a customized evaluation conducted by a team of institutional peers across a comprehensive, defined set of criteria. The evaluation team is hand-picked so that each institution is evaluated by a select group of peers from campuses sharing similar education, financial, and physical characteristics. Because each FMEP is customized and tailored to the specific institution for which it is conducted, the resulting report consists of feedback and recommended actions that are personalized to each institution and designed to help transform participating educational facilities programs into those worthy of international recognition. Further to the point,

the FMEP criteria and the criteria that are utilized to evaluate institutions that apply for the APPA Award for Excellence in Facilities Management are the same.

If organizations are to continuously improve over time, they need a set of criteria established by a third-party organization, set as a professional guideline or standard for excellence. In the private sector, the Baldrige National Quality Program Criteria for Performance Excellence is well known as such a tool. APPA has patterned its evaluation criteria after this model encompassing similar core values and concepts such as: visionary leadership, customer-driven excellence, organiza-

tional and personal learning, valuing employees and partners, agility, focus on the future, managing for innovation, management by fact, social responsibility, focus on results and creating value, and a systems perspective.

The FMEP represents a system approach whereby all 57 performance-oriented requirements are incorporated within a set of seven criteria or categories:

- leadership
- strategic and operational planning
- customer focus
- information and analysis
- development and management of human resources
- process management, and performance results.

This integrated system embraces the central idea that “it is not possible to achieve excellence by only doing some of the things that are easy and ignoring the rest.” These core values and performance criteria describe the organizational environment that we must create today and they are comprehensive enough to cover all aspects of leading and managing in the facilities management profession.

ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT AND SITE VISITS

When an institution chooses to undertake the Facilities Management Evaluation Program, they generally form a team representing a broad spectrum of their staff to assist in the development of their self-assessment/self-evaluation report. This is an important element in the overall success of the review. When individuals within the organization are actively involved in the process of formulating the department’s initial self-assessment, they have a greater understanding of the importance of the criteria and its associated processes, are more engaged during the site visit interviews, and are more apt to buy into implementing the organizational changes identified within the final report. In addition, the self-assessment report serves as the basis for the FMEP evaluation review team to conduct their site visit.

The site visit allows the team the opportunity to assess first-hand how well the

organization is performing against their own self-evaluation and conduct interviews with a broad range of the department’s stakeholders. Once the site visit is completed and an exit interview occurs with the institutional contact(s), the evaluation team prepares a thorough, final report that provides recommendations for strategic organizational improvement in the department’s program delivery and core business processes. Most organizations take the recommendations from the final report and formulate a departmental strategic plan to progress the facilities function in alignment with the recommendations and APPA standards.



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Again, it takes excellent leadership and professional management by facilities professionals to achieve this end. Clearly institutions continue to have challenges recruiting quality, multi-talented staff. Yet, at a minimum, we must ensure that our existing staff is well-trained and developed. What better way to do this than utilizing the FMEP criteria.

There are a number of ways the FMEP can offer the organization’s existing staff with opportunities for growth and development. First, engage APPA to perform an FMEP for their organization. Second, seek to become a qualified evaluator by attending APPA training workshops (offered next at the APPA 2010 conference in Boston July 14-16, 2010) and agreeing to be a team evaluator when called upon to do so. Third, utilize the FMEP criteria as a tool for internal organization analysis and assessment. In other words, the senior facilities officer can utilize this well-designed set of performance criteria,

and metrics to establish a pathway for staff development and organizational continuous improvement whether formally delivered or informally applied. Utilizing the FMEP throughout the organization helps the SFO engage their staff in professional development opportunities necessary to their growth and development by virtue of their engagement in the process and seeking the desired outcomes to achieve overall success.

PEOPLE MAKE IT HAPPEN

Further, without good people it is practically impossible to ensure good facilities. Someone recently said to me, “It’s the human networks, not the computer networks, that make things happen.” Indeed, the delivery of good facilities management is enhanced by powerful computer-based tools and techniques. However, it takes good, well-trained facilities professionals with strong management and leadership skills training and development.

Ultimately, it is a facilities professional’s role and responsibility to provide stewardship of the physical assets entrusted to him or her. Stewardship defined as “the conducting, supervising, or managing of something, especially the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one’s care.” We talk about stewardship a great deal, but it is really not well-understood by the institutional leadership, much less regularly practiced. Improving this understanding of the criticality of everyone’s responsibility for stewardship of our facilities starts with education and constant communication by the facilities professional and ends with delivering the goods—well-managed, well-maintained facilities performed by facilities professionals. Utilizing the FMEP criteria to establish solid organizational performance will go a long way to establish your organization as that credible steward of the institution’s physical resources. ☪

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