



Using the APPA Facilities Performance Indicators (FPI) Survey

By Al Stoverink, MSPA

If “Knowledge is Power,” then our ability to be effective in a “seat at the table” depends in large part on the quality and quantity of the information we can bring to the discussion. This article offers a brief review of how Arkansas State University Facilities Management is using the APPA Facilities Performance Indicators (FPI) Survey to expand resource access and develop improved relationships with critical information for executive council, deans, and other campus stakeholders. The APPA FPI Survey now includes almost 400 campuses with a wide array of data reports and a solid group of representative benchmarking peers for almost any size or type of institution.

The FPI Reports provide a great set of external benchmarking graphs that allow us to benchmark against peer or aspirant institutions in a wide variety of operational and asset management areas. More importantly perhaps, the FPI Reports provide critical benchmarking for self assessment and continuous improvement, particularly when used in conjunction with an overall continuous improvement performance measurement program. This is essentially what we have put in place at Arkansas State University. As a result, we have been able to enhance our performance measurement efforts internally with credible external benchmarking that allows us to communicate relevant and reliable information to decision makers and partners on campus.

One of the key benefits of this benchmarking and performance mea-

surement effort has been the expansion of critical budget resources in multiple areas, even during times of tight state budgets. One example of successful impact has been the gradual expansion of our Landscape Maintenance staffing and supplies budget.

In 2008, the university welcomed a new chancellor to the campus, replacing someone who had been in that position for 15 years. Soon after, the new chancellor introduced me to a new set of expectations on landscape maintenance which he brought with him, based on his experience at a smaller institution. Not only was he unhappy with the level of landscape maintenance, but he was also interested in the possibility of outsourcing these services (as well as any

other services) in facilities management. Our response was to quickly embark upon a serious benchmarking effort, which we had previously initiated in sporadic efforts, but without consistency or credible data.

In the landscape area particularly, we were operating under an erroneous perception of the amount of acreage being maintained. Based on the way this number had been calculated in prior years,

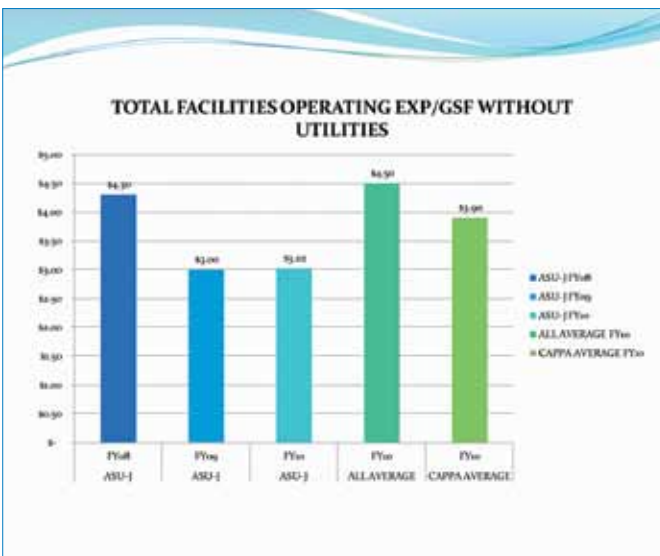
the university thought we were maintaining approximately 250 acres, similar to other institutions of our size. In reality, upon completing a review of our current campus land use, we suddenly realized that we were maintaining more than twice that number, which meant the demand on our budget, especially with the new expectations, was much greater than our resources.

We initially did a direct campus-to-campus tour and benchmarking comparison with four institutions in our region, then applied aerial geographic photo (downloaded from Google Earth) overlays of these institutions on our campus. We then pulled relevant data concerning operations costs and acreage from the APPA FPI Report Generator to expand

the comparison to the larger universe of institutions.

This three-pronged benchmarking—i.e., geographic overlays, direct campus-to-campus data, and the APPA FPI data—yielded a compelling presentation we were able to make to the chancellor. His understanding of the challenges we faced caused an immediate shift in perception of our landscape maintenance program. Subsequently, we have

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facilities management.

In addition, we have also been able to show benchmarking data from the FPI that confirms the low level of capital investment for deferred maintenance currently budgeted. This has been a factor in garnering greater recognition of the needs and support for project funding.

We have developed a standard FPI bench-

marking data sheet that is shared with the executive council, deans council, and university planning committee (aka budget). This information tool has elevated awareness around campus of continuing needs and a perception that we are good stewards of the budget resources provided. The result has been expanded resources in landscape maintenance, support for increases in charge rates for facilities labor, increased special project funding from campus reallocation sources for capital renewal, full support for keeping facilities services in house, and an enhanced image of facilities management as a professional organization in pursuit of excellence.

Finally, all of these benefits have resulted from a very low cost investment. As a member of APPA, our only cost to access the data that has made such an impact is the cost of our time to input our campus data into the annual survey and to do some data mining when the FPI Report Generator is populated each year with the newest survey data. This time involves three people essentially in our organization—the business services director, the planning/design/construction services director, and me. This investment has had one of the higher rates of return on a wide variety of initiatives we have attempted in our overall organization development process. We commonly refer to this process as the “Journey to Excellence,” which has led to achieving the APPA Award for Excellence, and providing direction for staff throughout facilities management. ☺

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The FPI Report can be accessed at www.appa.org/research/fpi.cfm.

been able to add staff as well as obtain additional supplies/services budget and encouragement from our vice chancellor for finance & administration to purchase equipment.

The above story involves some unique circumstances that would not apply for other organizations. But whatever the “unique circumstance” of any individual campus, the ability to present accurate, reliable information backed up by national data, specific to the issue at hand (available through the FPI Survey), can make a difference in any circumstance. We have experienced similar results in being able to show relatively low operating costs in custodial and other areas of