



Optimal Staffing for Very Small Campuses

By Matt Adams, P.E.

In the APPA Operational Guidelines Trilogy for Grounds, Custodial, and Maintenance, a wide variety of facilities are covered for our peer group. However, one area that was not fully covered was that of our peers with very small campuses. That group includes those non-profits that have 500,000 gross square feet or less. This peer group includes very small colleges, private schools, churches, and other institutions. In some ways the staffing of these organizations is even more critical than that of their larger colleagues. You can argue that more staff provides more options and flexibility. However, when your staff is less than 20 or even 10, the room for error is almost nil.

A FULL(ER) SCHEDULE

Just because an institution has a small footprint in no way indicates that the utilization of the facility is light. In fact, the opposite is most often true. Community colleges have classes from 8:00 a.m. until 10:00 p.m. six days each week. Churches have services and special events all weekend, daycare or school during the week, and provide meeting space for a myriad of ministries, clubs, and local organizations.

That all adds up to full utilization on a daily basis, coupled with dramatic peaks for special events. This characteristic demands the cleverest of staffing to support the mission of the institution. All of this is done in the limited budgetary environment where all nonprofits find themselves.

In the past, these institutions either



had to staff to the “peak” loads of the mission, or staff to the “average” load. In this case I am primarily referring to maintenance and custodial services, which are most impacted by the variable demand for services.

The first strategy would meet the demands of the institution, but ultimately fail because of financial inefficiency: the cost was just too high! The patrons, parents, or students would also notice that during normal loads there were staff members leaning on their proverbial brooms with too little to do.

On the other hand, staffing to normal or average workloads saves money but eventually gets the facilities director in hot water in a big way. The most visible time for most plant directors is during special events with high constituent participation—graduation, the big basketball game, or perhaps Easter. If the staff is too thin to adequately support these functions, the department is perceived as ineffectual as opposed to understaffed.

PEAKS AND VALLEYS

Many small institutions have begun to aggressively apply industry best practices

to solve the service peak-and-valley conundrum. To apply any new practices requires the director to first evaluate the services provided using this simple set of heuristics; 1) What services are technical and require special, often costly trade skills, 2) what services are “high-touch” and involve a great deal of interaction with my customers, and 3) what services are highly variable? Once all services are arrayed into a matrix that places them into a yes or no for each of these criteria the number crunching can begin.

An example of the classification process is HVAC maintenance. Applying our questions to this service reveals that there are two primary activities associated with this service and possibly a third variable service demand in some institutions. Assuming we want to perform a full planned maintenance schedule there is the “technical” work of licensed trade level HVAC work. This work does not have a high-touch characteristic and can be completed in off hours, etc. However, there is a component of high-touch service and that is the response to service calls. This includes responding to hot and cold calls but also some initial first responder light diagnosis.

Finally, there is the variable demand of special events. Very large ceremonies in the dead of winter or heat of summer might require on-call or even onsite HVAC skilled trades for altering the BMS temporarily or being prepared to emergencies.

BEST PRACTICES FOR ALL

To show how best practices can be applied to this scenario I will use the

real-world example of the Northside First United Church located in Atlanta. The director of maintenance, Tim Miltner, is well versed in our industry's best practices and applies them whenever appropriate. Miltner's goal is the same as everyone else in our industry: do more with less and keep the customers (church members) happy.

His campus is approximately 350,000 GSF. At one time his church maintenance staff totaled six and his annual renewal budget was inconsistent and often zero. Keeping the HVAC example, when the church's HVAC technician retired, his cost to the organization was \$42,000 per year with approximately 28 percent benefits totaling \$53,760 per year. These numbers are not exactly the same due to privacy issues, but accurate enough for this example.

Moving forward, Miltner negotiated a maintenance contract with the vendor

already familiar with the church for \$21,000 per year. This contract provides several key components: 1) full schedule of planned preventive maintenance, 2) responsibility for repair of systems requiring adjustments and light repairs that do not require parts of more than \$250, and 3) the hourly cost and mark-up percentage for parts of discretionary work, corrective repairs, staff for special events, and planned capital renewal.

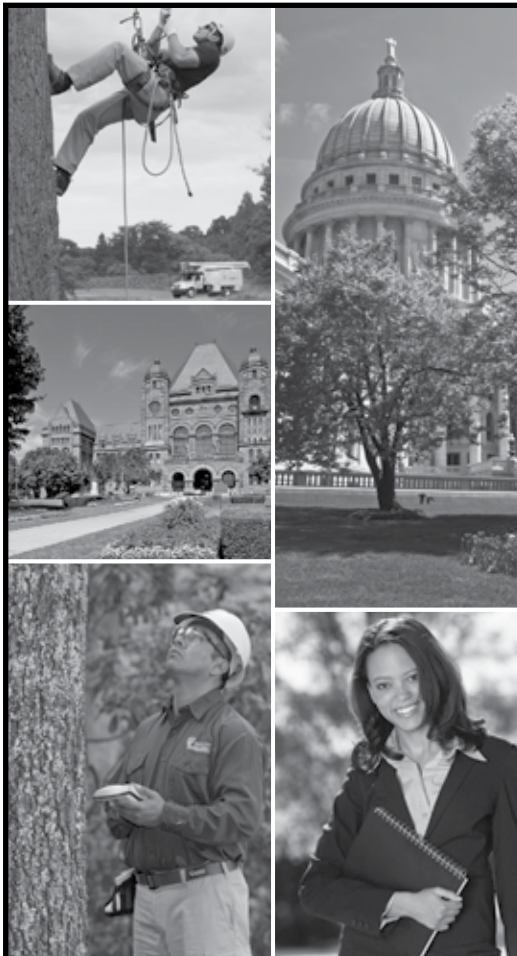
This contract covers the technical and low-touch elements of the service matrix. Now down to a staff of two in-house church employees, these people are the first responders.

So how are the numbers working out for the church? The original budget of \$53,760 has the new maintenance contract coming out of it (\$21,000) leaving \$32,760. Last year the time and material budget for unplanned corrective repairs was just under \$8,000 leaving \$24,760.

If you assume at 60/40 split of material and labor @ \$50 per hour this leaves 297 hours of discretionary trade labor and 9,900 in replacement parts used for planned renewal. Every year peak coverage for special events is deducted from this budget and a significant amount of planned capital renewal is executed.

This same methodology can be applied to each of the service centers—and was in this case. The customers remain happy to see the staff they are accustomed to while the “heavy lifting” is done by a contractor in most cases. Given the limited funding for capital renewal, this strategy has spun off more funds by rationalize the operating expenses. 💰

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 Matt Adams is president of FM², Atlanta, GA. He can be reached at matt@adams-fm2.com.



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