

APPA Is a Fellowship of Professionals That Feels Like Home to the Soul

By Brian Wilcox, CEFP, CCM

“As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.” (Proverbs 27:7)

I am one of the many who landed in higher education facilities management later in my career. Having spent 24 years in the private construction management industry, I had a substantial understanding of what delivering excellence in construction management services entailed. It was gained through a number of memorable experiences, both good and bad, and by outstanding training and much repetition. My professional development was guided by those who selflessly gave through superb coaching, cultivation, instruction, and in some cases internment while the fruit of excellence was ignited. I, like several others, worked alongside exceptional professionals who helped us find the road to excellence along the way.

The shared experiences we have with our colleagues at APPA are, without any doubt, invaluable to our growth, and this fellowship provides unmatched joy in our journey. Yet some might ask, “What can membership in a professional organization like APPA give me that my organization doesn’t already impart internally?” If I might, I would like to share a little of my story to illustrate how I answered this important question for myself a few years ago.

When I started in educational facilities management—again later in my career—I most assuredly did not yet understand what providing excellence in the varied areas of educational facilities management entails. I didn’t have the first clue. Having a background in the similar field of construction management gave me skills that do translate to this field, but those skills need guidance to be most effective for a work group and for an institution. I was a seasoned professional with no direct educational institution context to draw upon.

MY HOPE FOR A SOURCE OF SUPPORT

What I did hope for was that *somewhere* there had to be a source of guidance, quality training, and inspiration coming from those who had gone before me. There had to be a place where I could discover, along with exceptional professionals in this field both current and former, *how* to perform educational facilities management services with distinction and enjoy the ride while doing it! I needed to find those who could show me *how and what* to measure in our performance of these services and *where* to find the best resources in this field. What I found was this: APPA is defined by those longings.

APPA membership has met my needs so well over the past seven years! Its numerous resources have shown me how to navigate the multitude of complexities I face day in and day out. And the meaningful interaction and fellowship I have found in APPA with exceptional colleagues who are walking the same path is priceless.

For example, right on cue, while I was writing this article, an email invitation to join the monthly APPA webinar series came to my inbox:

“This panel discussion will bring together 3 key members of APPA to discuss major floods that have taken place on their campuses over the last several years and the process they followed for remediation, restoration and recovery along with all the proper insurance paperwork that needed to be completed.”

Once again, APPA has found yet another way to help its members perform better at their institutions through another direct knowledge transfer, making their offering available to all members. All you have to do is opt in!



It is my view that if you look at any higher education facilities management staff operating without APPA's organizational frameworks and its many proven strategies and measures, you will likely find an organization adrift without a rudder; open to any voice regardless of competency, albeit well-meaning. To put it simply, APPA has the tools for success that lead us to ask the right questions.

SEEING OURSELVES GLOBALLY

What is your annual facility operating expenditure? What is the average age of your campus buildings and how should that information inform you as to where to allocate resources and when? What is your campus's facility condition index (FCI)? How should you complete the APPA Facilities Performance Indicators (FPI) survey? And when collecting the data for the FCI, do you format it to feed directly into the FPI? What performance should be measured by your managers and to what end? Are the metrics aligned with your institution? Are they aligned with your peer institutions and with the industry as a whole? Are you tapping into space data that is already being collected by your institution to align measured assets? These are the kinds of global questions APPA helps you to answer.

APPA venues and resources bring the right questions to the table and help us to see globally. Moreover, APPA drills down into the strategies that work and the myriad of tasks that make the difference between an average institution and a pacesetter institution. And we as members all have the privilege of sharing in this exceptional knowledge transfer.

But APPA says, "Let's not stop there! How about taking this knowledge base that we have, drawing upon the strengths of our outstanding members, and transforming our industry?" So we start, for instance, a task force to develop an American National Standards Institute (ANSI) standard. Or the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) taps into our resources to improve standards and codes related to educational facilities management, having a direct impact on the improvement of life safety for our students and colleagues. Now that's excellence!

APPA MAKES A DIFFERENCE

What has become a pleasure for me is to find in APPA a large group of professionals that do not set out for mediocrity or the status quo. They are making a difference in the lives of people and institutions. And without APPA, we in the educational facilities management industry are adrift without a rudder.

I recommend to everyone without reservation that they join APPA quickly and get involved. Remember that membership in APPA helps everyone in the member institution who takes the initiative to look closely at all that is available to them through this great organization.

The more that people within your institution begin to utilize APPA's abundant resources, the more improvements you will see there, until critical mass takes hold for real organizational change. APPA is truly remarkable! ☺

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