

Getting Invited to Dinner

By Lindsay E. Wagner

If I had a dollar for every time I have been involved in a conversation about facilities managers not having a seat at the table, there is a good chance I could retire. Why are you still standing outside the dinner party talking about this? It is time to knock on the door and provide the host a gift that not only gets you a seat, but also makes you the guest of honor. I am sure when you hear “gift,” you think of money and you are right back to pacing around outside the dinner party because you have no money. What if I told you that the greatest gift you could give is free?

Over 450 learning institutions are currently realizing the benefits of APPA’s **Facilities Performance Indicators (FPI)** measurement services. FPI empowers the educational facilities professional with the vital data, statistical references, and reporting tools needed to measure operations and performance, identify capital asset realities, and lead a successful facilities strategy that supports the institution’s mission and vision.

What does this have to do with being invited to dinner? Well, data is defined as “facts or statistics gathered together for reference or analysis.” It is the plural form of “datum,” which is a single piece of information or a fixed starting

point from which inferences may be drawn. The origin of “datum” is the Latin *dare*, meaning “to give,” so “datum” means “something given.” Could the FPI data be the gift that gets you a seat at the table? Yes, but there are some goals that you should keep in mind as you complete your annual FPI survey and package up your data to present as gifts.

ALIGNMENT

The presentation of your data must be in alignment with your institution’s goals, mission, and strategy. The first step in developing this alignment is establishing a firm understanding of what the institutional mission is and relating that to the maintenance and operation of the buildings and grounds. The FPI survey provides data that can potentially answer questions regarding how well your facilities portfolio aligns with your institution’s strategic direction and academic focus, but this quantitative data alone holds little meaning. You must gather some qualitative data of your own and figure out how you can best influence the execution of the broader institutional mission and how the data you possess can be a driving force in institutional planning and decision making.

ACCURACY

The accuracy and reliability of the data that you collect is paramount. If you are new to the FPI survey, spend time getting familiar with the definitions that are provided for all inputs. As you move through the survey, take notes that define the location of the data you will input in the survey, so that you can return to the same source each year. If there are multiple sources for a single input that show different results, be sure you know why and are able to explain the difference if it is questioned. It is possible that multiple departments across an institution may track and house what is perceived to be the same data, yet the numbers are different. Don’t get caught up in this. Simply see to it that you can justify and ensure continuity of all data inputs year after year.

CREDIBILITY

If you can establish alignment with your institutional mission and show accuracy, you will begin to build credibility. You will become the source of information required to answer questions regarding operational efficiency, funding levels, ownership costs, and investment decisions. If you make it known that you have an accurate data source that



you know how to unpack and present in context with your institutional mission, people will be fighting to sit next to you at the dinner table.

RELATIONSHIPS

There is something in the FPI for every possible stakeholder in the institution, from the president to the students. You have to be willing to get to know each one of these stakeholders and develop an understanding of their role in the broader institutional mission. How can you use the gifts you possess to assist them? If they had an understanding of your role in the big picture, how could they assist you? As your credibility grows, people will seek out relationships with you. The key to a fruitful relationship is a willingness to understand their roles and how you can assist in their success. Then their success will become your success, because ultimately you have a shared mission.

PARTICIPATION

Get your staff involved. As you develop skills in unpacking the data and using it as a gift, have them do the same with their department-specific data. In the APPA delivery of the Supervisor's Toolkit, a supervisor's requirement to manage both up and down is discussed repeatedly. Armed with the FPI data, the supervisor could use it as a motivational tool for frontline workers and as a justification when bringing forward budget requests or annual plans. Department-wide participation allows the development of a common language and the ability to move forward with a unified front.

PROFESSIONALISM

It is APPA's mission to transform facilities professionals into higher-performing managers and leaders, which helps transform member institutions into more inviting and supportive learning environments, which in turn elevates educational facilities' recognition and value and their direct impact on the recruitment and retention of students, faculty, and staff. APPA provides the FPI survey to member institutions as one tool to utilize. It is up to you to use it and to know and understand the data and how it relates to your institution's mission. Taking responsibility for the presentation and productive use of this data is the ultimate expression of professionalism.

DECIDING ON THE GIFT

Now that you know the extent of the data that is available, you have to decide on the perfect gift that

will get you the dinner invitation you are after. Start by aligning with your institutional mission. Be sure you have a clear understanding of your institutional goals and strategies, and then figure out how you can best present yourself as an asset to the institution.

Ensure that the data you are collecting and using as inputs in the FPI survey is accurate. Develop confidence in the data and use it to establish credibility with campus stakeholders. Build relationships with all those stakeholders and develop an understanding of their role in the mission and how you can provide gifts that will help them succeed. Get your staff involved. Empower them with data and the ability to use it effectively. Ultimately, use the FPI to display your professionalism. Knock on the door and provide the greatest gift a person can give: relevant and accurate information.

If you need some assistance gift shopping, APPA can help. The 2015-2016 APPA FPI Survey cycle begins in July 2016, giving you plenty of time to start thinking about this gift. There is no cost for member institutions to participate, and the FPI report is free to all participating institutions.

APPA offers FPI training and consulting services that are delivered by a team of qualified facilities performance advisors. FPI advisors are seasoned and experienced educational facilities professionals who have a career history with APPA member institutions. They understand the business and what can be achieved through the FPI. They can train campus personnel in FPI data collection or collect the data on your behalf. They can also provide a third-party interpretation of your data and help you unpack it, creating the perfect gifts for key campus stakeholders. Contact Christina Hills for more information on these services at christina@appa.org. ☎

Lindsay Wagner is a Ph.D. student at Colorado State University, a professor at Wentworth Institute of Technology, and a freelance consultant. You can reach her at lindsayewagner@gmail.com.

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