

Expanding Research at APPA

By Norm Young
Vice President for Information and Research



One of the five foundational strategies of APPA's Strategic Plan 2020 is to expand research, and the plan identifies two overarching goals to accomplish this. The first is to create an improved and more customizable interface for creation and gathering of information and research.

This will be accomplished largely by updating our website, developing apps, and providing other electronic means to enhance the retrieval and interactivity available with existing content through many sources, such as completed research projects, Body of Knowledge (BOK) chapters, Facilities Performance Indicators (FPI) data, and our extensive library of publications. The greatest impact will come from improving our website, and work on this significant and time-consuming

process has already begun.

The second goal includes targeting new research efforts that focus on the needs of our profession, and it is in this area that some recent changes in the research process have occurred.

RESEARCH THROUGH CFAR

APPA formed the Center for Facilities Research (CFaR) in 2002 to grow our knowledge base primarily through member-driven research. This has produced significant bodies of work that have provided content and best practices for all that we publish and teach. CFaR, through its directors and advisors, provides structure and guidance for researchers.

Until now, the process has relied heavily on individual members to develop ideas and propose research projects.

Recently, the Information and Research Committee developed a plan to proactively seek out topics and ideas for expanding our knowledge through targeted research. We will do this by mining the key issues developed in and through APPA's already established processes, forums, summits, and symposiums.

Potential researchers who have developed their own ideas and topics will still have the opportunity to submit proposals, and CFaR will continue to provide support. What's new is the concept of building a relevant and current topic list for consideration by would-be researchers, writers, and professional development providers.

RESEARCH INFORMED BY TLS

The starting point for the Information and Research Committee's task of topic mining has been the Thought Leaders Series (TLS), for which annual symposiums held since 2006 have produced a cornucopia of topics in the form of questions to be asked and issues needing solutions. Each year APPA, led by the TLS chairperson Jack Colby, brings together institutional leaders from colleges and universities across the United States and Canada alongside association leaders, industry consultants, and topical experts to discuss the future of higher education and the impact of that future on education facilities.

The 2015 symposium, *Facilities & Technology: The Transformation of "Campus,"* highlighted in *Facilities Manager* magazine (September/October and November/December 2015, available on the APPA website), has produced a robust list of topics that could potentially become the basis of research projects, professional development programs, and articles in various publications, all of which would add to our growing body of knowledge (the list can be found on the CFaR page of the APPA website.)

ENGAGING INDIVIDUALS

After reviewing the latest TLS monograph and disseminating the list of topics, each member of the Information and Research Committee has agreed to take the list to their respective regions and begin a campaign to distribute the list through their regional boards, committees, and junior/senior representatives. The goal is to identify individuals who may have an interest in taking on a topic, whether through a research project or at any level, including articles and questions posed on the APPAinfo discussion list.

In keeping with our theme of engagement, the committee members will then contact those that have been identified to offer assistance or guidance as needed. The list is also being circulated through established lines of communication between APPA, its business partners, and other associations as appropriate, as part of a collaborative process.

Early indications suggest there is a high level of interest to pursue targeted research topics developed through our well-regarded programs such as the TLS.

A process of using information gained through the TLS for professional development fodder has been in place for some time. This new practice of proactively mining topics for research has the potential to significantly broaden our

knowledge base. Ultimately though, we would like to expand the topic mining to include other discussion-based forums at APPA. Specifically, the Senior Facilities Officers (SFO) and the Emerging Professionals (EP) summits can be fertile ground for new ideas, and each may become a significant contributor to expanded research as well.

WHY EXPAND RESEARCH?

Expanding research at APPA is critical to our future success, as was anticipated during the thoughtful process that brought us the 2020 strategic plan. Our ability to intuitively search for and interactively access our existing body of knowledge through improved Web navigation and other electronic means is vital and is being addressed through a significant upgrade.

Equally vital is our ability to consistently leverage all the contributions our members, institutional leaders, and partners bring to us that help us remain relevant in rapidly changing times. New research, updated professional development programs, and timely publications are the result of capturing and disseminating those contributions. A focus on easily accessed, targeted research is one of the many ways APPA can help all of its members to remain influential leaders in the years to come. ☞

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