

Building Solutions

Giving Facilities a Voice

As a facilities leader, you are the mouthpiece for your campus facilities. Serving as the spokesperson for the largest asset on campus and ensuring its success and health is a large burden to bear. You have a responsibility to share the needs of the facility by communicating those needs powerfully and effectively. Then, when you have their attention, prepare yourself for conversations with your school leadership.

To effectively communicate and speak for your facility, you must be thoroughly acquainted with it. Start by conducting a facility audit to assess the current state of campus facilities and identify any deferred maintenance that requires attention. Prepare a detailed year-by-year breakdown of anticipated costs of addressing the maintenance needs while planning for replacements of components that are not cost-effective to repair and maintain. Be sure to acknowledge those needs that have been identified by trustees and senior administrators, so you can speak to what may be on their “favorites” list on the same platform as the list of items you know about through daily operations.

Consider ways that essential replacements and major repairs can be combined with high-visibility, popular projects and tied to master planning goals. Replacing old and unsightly ceilings may be incorporated into a lighting fixture retrofit project that pays for itself in energy expenditures. As the facilities leader, you should be aware of the campus master plan and advocate for keeping it current. You should have a comprehensive utility master plan that addresses infrastructure needs that match up with the planned future campus development. If leadership reacts to new situations or programs with changes to facilities use that were not considered in the master plan, you may be the first to recognize that inconsistency. It is your responsibility to point out the deviation and its significance.

Now that you have the tools and planning required to effectively discuss campus conditions, how do you prepare to present this information accurately? Start by scheduling regular meetings with leadership to understand their strategic goals and priorities and confirming that your facilities master plan aligns with the institution’s broader mission. This alignment will help you focus your presentation and make it relevant to your audience. Before meetings, prepare by anticipating challenging questions and formulating clear, well-supported responses. Provide clear and concise summaries of campus conditions and needs with visual images. Where possible, back up your recommendations with data and financial analysis. Turn to your peers for successful ideas that they might offer.

When facility operating decisions are reactions to problems, rather than being true choices borne out of proactive strategy, they may cause unnecessary cost and reduced customer satisfaction.

After speaking as the “voice” of facilities to your supervisor and school leadership, you may have the opportunity to do the same with a Board of Trustees or committees to the Board, such as Finance or Facilities. Having that opportunity is a sign of success. Embrace it. It requires more of the same things you’ve been practicing, but you will have to present the ideas even more briefly to an audience that is even less acquainted with the facilities. A CFO, COO, Director of Advancement, or others who regularly present data to the Board can give you pointers and may even help by reviewing your presentation.

It is a demanding endeavor, being the vocal mouthpiece for the campus’s largest asset. Facilities are long term, illiquid investments. Changes to facilities are expensive and difficult, so they should be approached with as much information and as little emotion as possible. By being an effective spokesperson for this extremely important asset, you can play an invaluable role in advancing your school’s mission.



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