

## Facilities Management Reflection Paper

The most difficult part about critiquing a facility as an outsider (who is always thinking of programming) is the separation of programming from the physical structure. One must realize that with a faulty facility, programming has a greater chance of becoming faulty as well. As a provider of recreation, it will be my job to insure a safe facility that is able to provide a great location to serve its mission.

I visited five facilities, each one significantly different in their missions and environments. While there were many differences, one thing was clearly observed: proper planning is essential to the success of the programming offered and a properly maintained facility can make the difference between great programming and mediocre programming.

Several best practices emerged in the facilities. These should be thought of at the beginning of the facility planning process but can be included at any time as they will serve to make a facility more able to serve its patrons.

1. Will the usage of the facility be active/passive/mixed use?

Programming will determine the answers to this question. If it is to be used actively, one must consider the specific programs it is to be used for. If there is to be a baseball field, one must think about all of the things that are inclusive in the activity of baseball (bleachers, concessions, restrooms, gates, mounds, bases, bats, balls (and where to store them) and ways to ensure a safe atmosphere while the participants play ball.

If the facility is to have a more passive use, such as a park, there must be places that will encourage ideas of recreation that the participant seeks to engage in. One such example is Ben Burton Park in Athens, GA. There are many picnic

tables along a very picturesque river setting. A large, landscaped field exists without goalposts or trees in the middle of it. This type of open space encourages many forms of non-organized activity.

2. How many participants will the facility be expected to serve at one time?

If the facility is designed to be used by large numbers of people, they must be designed to accommodate them. One small restroom might be fine for an activity center that serves twenty people, but will not be sufficient for two hundred. If you build a facility parking area that has spaces for fifteen automobiles, it can provide frustration when the sixteenth car comes in. Facilities that leave the would-be patron frustrated are not likely to encourage people to come back. What use is the facility if there are no people willing to go to it?

3. Is your facility accessible and how will people access it? How will you ensure that people cannot come to your facility when it is not open?

One must offer easy accessibility to ensure proper traffic. As stated above, if people cannot get to your facility, of what use is your great programming? Entryways should be free of obstructions and set us in an orderly manner. If it feels unorganized or the atmosphere is uncomfortable to a patron, that patron is unlikely to return and, most likely, will tell three friends not to go either. Placing a bicycle rack on the premises will encourage those who do not drive to come to your facility. A guard house or a sign at the entrance with clear directions will serve to put the patron more at ease in an unfamiliar location. Another way to ensure this ease is to hire and train staff who believe the experiences of the

customer will be enhanced by providing quality customer service. Being happy to give directions or arranging to help the patron get where they want to go means a lot to the patron who seeks a friendly place in which to be served his recreations.

Ensuring that your facility is accessible to patrons in wheelchairs or those who are visually impaired will ensure that you do not exclude the potential patron. By researching the guidelines set forth by the Americans with Disabilities Act, one can expect to accomplish any accessibility goals set forth.

4. Quality signage, both directional and informational, should be hung in appropriate places.

Appropriate signage serves many purposes to the patron. Directional signage orients the patron to the new surroundings of which they are a part. Maps should be clear, with landmarks and “you are here” arrows prominently displayed. Unreadable maps will serve to frustrate the patron.

Informational signage is important as well. If there is an area in your park that is close to the water, rest assured that a patron will decide to go for a swim. By putting up signs that tell the patron “No Swimming Allowed Due to Dangerous Piranha Infestation”, there will likely be no water excursions. (Though building a fence is probably a great idea too!)

By making signs in multiple languages and Braille, the planner is ensuring all potential patrons will be on a level playing field in regards to obtainable information. Further, the patron will become more comfortable in a place that has not forgotten about him and will likely return.

Proper sign placement is essential for the knowledge to be transferred to the patron. If a sign is not at eye level, the

patron will be forced to search for information that should be readily accessible.

5. The patron should take away a positive overall impression of the facility.

There are many ways to ensure a positive experience is had by all patrons. Keeping the landscaping free from unintentional debris and the walls clean and well taken care of are great ways to show that the managers of a facility care about its welfare. If a patron sees a restroom wall heavily covered in graffiti, he is more likely to add to the graffiti. (I have seen this occur frequently). However, if graffiti is removed immediately, the wall is less likely to be written on again.

The manager should also make an effort to give patrons choices in recycling their waste. If there are two containers, one for paper trash and one for glass trash –both clearly marked- the public is much more likely to recycle their bottles. An awareness of environmental issues will send the message to patrons that the establishment cares not only for the specific environment of which the facility is a part, but also the Earth, on which we all must live. This behavior has only good consequences for our environment and costs very little to accomplish.

6. Create a mission statement that is clear and is thought of by programmers when programming decisions are being made.

A complete mission statement does not have to be so specific that programs cannot be added, but it should not be so broad that it is meaningless. It is helpful to post the mission within your facility and add information in a close proximity that explains how the offered programming

services the mission that has been chosen. This can be especially important when a facility seeks donations in order to provide a service which may not pay for itself but is important. If a potential contributor believes in the mission of a facility, and can see how that mission is being upheld, he is more likely to give money or time or resources toward the success of the providing facility.

7. In order to offer programs geared toward specific age groups, consideration related to those age groups should be thought about.

In order to successfully program for an older population, one must consider some very specific facets of the lifestyle and limitations of the older person. While there are some people who can climb long flights of stairs into their nineties, many older patrons would prefer an elevator. (Since you have already had one installed to meet the needs of your wheelchair-bound patrons, this should not present a problem.) According to many gerontologists, a facility with long hallways and doors that bear strong resemblance to each other should be avoided as they add to confusion of a participant with dementia.

In order to successfully program to an adolescent population, one must allow for a facility that does not seem to overpower an adolescent's sense of privacy while at the same time allows supervision to occur. Further, adolescents have a deep need to be able to make their own choices. Offering a range of activities suited to interests is a good starting point.

To program for an adult population, best practices include programming toward interests and making it easy to get what they want to get out of the program. Actively pursuing interests of participants by asking questions and letting them learn things that are readily adaptable to their

own lives is a great beginning. By hiring staff that are knowledgeable about adult learning theory will make the impartation of programming easier and more fun for the participants.

Programming for the child audience requires much in the area of the physical environment. Safety is one of the prime mandatory elements in a facility designed for children. Parents will not allow their children to be put at risk through neglect of facilities. By building playgrounds with current materials and following child-centered safety guidelines, much can be done to minimize risks to participants. A thorough survey of all facilities through the eyes of a child is a great beginning to a child centered recreation facility.

8. Risk management is a very important process with wide-reaching implications regarding any facility.

Risk management is a long-term, never ending process. Without a staff member or outsourced agent specifically involved in risk management aspects of a facility, accidents will occur more frequently, until at the last, there will no longer be a need for your facility due to lack of participants. The ability to identify both obvious and potential hazards AND make the changes required to fix them is one of the most important skills a recreation provider can have.

The points I have illustrated above all work toward the same end. If your facility is such that participants stop coming, there will be no need for your facility. It will not matter how good a mission statement you have. It will not matter that your programs are great and needed and have far reaching benefits to the participants. All that will matter is that your facility is unsafe and empty. By focusing on ways to keep your center healthy, you will keep the participants happy. A happy participant is what recreation facilities are all about.