



Key Ingredients of a Business Plan

Tips from Professionals on Developing a Successful Plan for Campus Operations

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According to the 2007 *College Construction Report* compiled by peer publication *College Planning & Management*, colleges and universities spent over \$15.1 billion in construction in 2006, the highest total to date. New facilities and their corresponding expanded operations are coming on-line due to increased enrollment, a need to stay competitive, and demand from students. Unfortunately, many of today's buildings and their operations are being planned, designed, and constructed without a formal business plan. As universities consider the need to develop or expand their offerings, it is critical to develop a business plan that outlines the future direction of the operation.

The Importance of a Business Plan

Developing a business plan not only helps answer the question, "Why are we doing this?," but it also lays the foundation for how the facility will operate at all levels. Once completed, the business plan functions as a guide on how to market and operate a facility. In other words, the business plan is a "how to" guide for existing and future staff. Understanding and developing clear and concise goals at the project outset will serve as an outline in developing a successful business plan.

Figure 1.1 - SAV Analysis Recreation

Legend:												
University's Target Objectives / Aspirations										○		
University's Existing Achievements										X		
	Low					High						
Strategic Objectives By Category	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Comments
II. Enrollment Management												
a. Recruitment (campus tour / expectations)						○						<p>0 = The school believes that students should be motivated to attend based on the quality of its programs only and not on the basis of recreational facilities.</p> <p>10 = The school is interested in making the best possible impression on prospective students visiting the campus. There should significant emphasis on the architectural quality of the interior and exterior spaces including landscaping and hardscape. Facilities should produce a "wow" response.</p> <p>Recreation Department: Recreation is not perceived to play a significant role in recruiting efforts. Current policies and facilities do not hurt or enhance enrollment, and generally are not included in campus tours.</p>
b. Retention (consistency / quality of experience)											○	<p>0 = The school is not interested in providing a high quality experience to its student and crowded conditions would be tolerated.</p> <p>10 = Patron capacity is of the highest priority. Service quality and breadth of programs is also important.</p> <p>Recreation Department: With such a large campus, the goal is to make students feel like they are part of a small group, in which recreation can play a significant role. Recreation's lack of control, in terms of scheduling and programming, weakens the intention of the University's goal.</p>

It is important to understand that the business plan is a "living" document that will evolve as the market changes; therefore, periodic updates are necessary to reflect changes in demand preferences, demographics, policies and priorities. The following is a list of components that must go into a business plan, followed by a detailed explanation of each:

BUSINESS PLAN COMPONENTS

1. Case Statement
2. Market Context
3. Operating Paradigm
4. Organizational Structure & Staffing Plan
5. Marketing Plan & Opportunities
6. Risk Mitigation Plan
7. Implementation Schedule
8. Financials

1 Case Statement – Knowing Your Institutions

The case statement answers the critical question, "Why are we doing this?" In order to answer this question, it is important to first establish parameters in which this project is intended to serve. This process involves identifying and conducting interviews with the appropriate representatives from various departments that will either operate, support, or in some way be affected by the project. It will be important to also establish a working group that will be involved throughout the process, which will be comprised of key decision-makers. Finally, interviewing senior administrators, who understand the global effect of developing specific projects, helps identify potential pitfalls and opportunities. The conversations should note the current value of facilities and services and set future targets in the categories of enhancing key outcomes. These goals and objectives are

like checks and balances to ensure the project meets the intended outcomes throughout the entirety of the process. The process can take many forms; for example, in working on a recreation project, the following analysis was used to assess the importance of how recreation coincides with enrollment management.

(See Fig 1.1 - SAV Analysis Recreation above)

Targeted Outcomes

For a project to meet the targeted outcomes identified in the above analysis, it is imperative that the mission and objectives align with the university. In addition, the targeted outcomes must be relevant to the project's mission by providing optimal opportunities for the student population. The case statement will also describe the overall concept of a new facility or operation that includes services provided, hours of operation, activities that will be offered, target market and customers, project type (i.e. size, program spaces),

staff needed to operate the facility, and will highlight any financial considerations that may be unique to this project.

An important consideration that campuses are now dealing with is the extent to which the new facilities achieve certain standards with regard to the environment. The need to achieve LEED certification will impact the overall cost and operating expenses for a new facility and should be part of early discussions.

2 Market Context – Knowing Your Market

Understanding the goals and objectives for the proposed project helps define the market segment for which the facility will serve. Conducting a market analysis provides the qualitative and quantitative information necessary to assess demand for specific spaces, room types, retail, programs, and activities. The results of these analyses enable the university to derive a market-responsive program. The steps necessary to understand the market may include the following tasks:

- A demographic analysis to review the student, faculty, staff, and alumni demographics to gain a detailed understanding of the makeup of the population. Information analyzed includes student population distributions by age, class, residence, school division, and financial aid needs. For employees, population distributions are provided for age, employment classification, and zip code. Alumni demographics include year of graduation and current mailing zip code. For projects that may include community support (i.e. recreation membership), a review of population characteristics such as age, income, and education attainment may also be necessary.
- A series of on-campus focus groups and interviews assessing perception of, and demand for, various facility amenities and programs. This is a great opportunity to speak directly to the market that will eventually utilize the project under consideration. Input from this group is important in moving

forward with a survey that quantitatively tests proposed concepts.

- A survey of competitive institutions and their facilities and operations. This may include site visits to selected competitive facilities to compile documentation identifying and assessing interior and exterior amenities offered, price structure, access to campus, and other pertinent features. This inventory will allow one to evaluate the range of changes that the college might consider in order to compete more effectively.
- A survey of students, faculty, and staff is a valuable tool to help assess demand for specific activities, amenities, and programs and can be distributed in an efficient manner to solicit entire campus populations or stratified segments. The survey provides the necessary information to develop a building program that comes directly from the target market.

In order to ensure that the operations continue to remain competitive and meet the university's needs-and in some cases, the community's needs-the following should be completed on a regular basis: an updated analysis of the off-campus market; a student, faculty, and staff survey; and an analysis of national trends.

Figure 1.2 - Market Update Schedule

Analysis	Update
Focus Groups	Annually
Off Campus Market Analysis	Annually
Demographic Analysis	Annually
Competitive Context	Every three years
Survey	Annually after 2.5 years

3 Operating Paradigm – Determine How to Make It Work

Each type of facility has different parameters and models that are unique to a project. Determining which model works best is dependent on the goals and objectives as well as the market opportunities that exist. For instance, a recreation facility may choose an operating paradigm that focuses on maximizing

revenues through the development and marketing of a large menu of optional programs such as aerobics classes, yoga, personal training, wellness assessments, and other non-credit instructional programs. This approach allows for differential membership pricing for students, employees, alumni, retirees, and sponsored guests. The privileges and services associated with the membership package would be limited to an extent that a market for the programs and optional services emerges naturally.

This paradigm requires creating a very customer-friendly environment that encourages members to utilize the facility often because the program revenue potential will be largely driven by daily patronage levels. Through this strategy, students will be provided a measure of traditional recreational services such as intramural competition, but due to the customer service orientation of the program-driven approach, opportunities to accommodate a large variety of rentals to outside groups will be limited.

The primary advantage of this approach is that both revenue and student satisfaction potentials are high. This traditionally meets with the university's commitment to student needs first and foremost. The primary disadvantage is that a substantial amount of the revenue will be speculative in nature, which will

require a high level of commitment and skill.

In considering the best approach to be taken, it is important to take a step back and review the goals and objectives established in the

case statement and market analysis.

4 Organizational Structure & Staffing Plan – Knowing Whom You Need to Make It Happen

Developing an organizational structure and staffing plan for a new facility or operation will enable the project to be up and running when completed. The first step in this process is to develop an "ide-

al" staffing plan without thinking about existing personnel and constraints. From this, the staffing plan can then be structured to include a list of key employees and their specific roles

in the facility's operation. To help in determining this list, the business plan should include detailed descriptions that address the reporting structure and responsibilities of each position.

For new positions a recruiting strategy is also suggested to assist in identifying qualified personnel to manage specific duties. In cases where it may be more effective to contract certain positions, the plan should define which positions fall under this category and why this strategy is more effective. It is important to have core business plan decisions made prior to hiring key staff. To ensure that the appropriate hiring decisions are made, it is also important to realize that there is a high correlation between service (e.g. staff) and the level of revenues (e.g. memberships) that the facility or operation can generate.

The staffing plan is an integral component of the financial model, and the impact of any refinements needs to be tested immediately against the project's projected financial performance and debt capacity.

5 Marketing Plan & Opportunities – Committing to a Plan & Setting Objectives

Utilization of a new facility or success of a new operation is based on an effective marketing plan. To this point, the plan has answered the questions, "Why are we doing this?" and "For whom are we doing this?" The marketing plan addresses the issue of "How do we get people to utilize the facility or operation?" The marketing plan is a two-step process which begins with a pre-opening marketing strategy

Figure 1.3 - Operating Paradigms

Operating Paradigms		
Traditional	Program Driven	Facility Driven
Student Focus Small Staff	Customer Service Driven Fees for Service Increased dependency on speculative revenues Increased marketing and staffing costs	Revenues focused on rentals and events Can affect open recreation schedule

with the goal of generating excitement. This first step may include the following:

- Putting information on the department's web site
- Information mailings
- Brochures to students and employee homes
- Advertisements in newsletters and newspapers
- Mailings to alumni
- Mailings to friends and benefactors
- Special invitations to community and municipal representatives
- Table tents in the cafeterias
- Events
 - Groundbreaking event
 - "Hard Hat" tours of construction site
 - Membership open house week
 - Grand opening celebration
- Marketing Collateral
 - Exhibit trailer
 - Sample equipment/amenities (depending on the facility type)
 - Video/slide show
 - Building model and renderings

The second step is the overall marketing plan and detailed budget that will be part of the financial model. This plan addresses the specific processes and protocols that will be established for the facility or operation in terms of sales process, customer service strategy, use of technology, and other specific services.

6 Risk Mitigation Plan – Knowing Your Risks & Options

Developing a good plan requires the college to consider "what if" scenarios. The importance of developing a risk mitigation plan is to anticipate potential challenges and to determine the most effective methods for mitigating the risks these challenges might pose.

Identification of potential problems includes:

- Market demand shifts
- Fee base (enrollment stability)
- Fundraising goals not met
- Increased competition (off campus / other schools)
- Increased operating costs (utilities, salaries, replacements)

Developing the plan includes:

Pre-Opening Period

For contingency purposes, a capital reserve may be developed prior to opening for the purpose of covering unexpected increases in operating expenses.

Start-Up Phase

As the facility opens or operations come on-line and begin to "ramp up" and establish stable revenues, acute attention should be given to the market's response to the operation. If the market does not respond favorably, pricing and service offerings need to remain flexible to allow the fee structure, rates, services, and programs to accommodate user demands. It will be the function



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of management to properly address feedback received from constituents.

Ongoing Research & Quality Control

During the start-up phase, initial and sustained facility and service quality are particularly important to maintain user loyalty and frequent use. Add a commitment to staying current regarding trends in the specific industry, and the facility or operation should remain competitive with new or renovated competition in the future.

7 Implementation Schedule – Prioritize & Plan

Another ingredient of the business plan involves developing a schedule of specific tasks and dates for which these tasks need to be accomplished. These tasks include:

- Budgeting
- Staff development (recruitment, training, and contracting)
- Systems development & integration (marketing, memberships, and service delivery)
- Program development
- Marketing & public relations
- Construction
- Grand opening

8 Financials – Funding & Operating Strategies

Another key component of the business plan includes setting financial targets based on projected revenue opportunities (i.e. student fees, memberships, programs, retail sales, rates, and other activities), operating expenses, and building standards (i.e. LEED certification). Meeting or exceeding these designated targets will preserve or enhance the ability to pursue other university obligations. To help finance these projects, schools are starting to explore partnerships with other departments or private entities, as well as opportunities to lessen the burden on students.

Fundraising is another option that is used on many campuses to offset development and operating expenses. With various streams of monies available it is important to address the project economics, financing alternatives, and implementation strategies. The result

of the project economics analysis is a project-wide “sources and uses” statement that identifies all potential debt and equity funding (project sources) and all anticipated project costs (project uses). It is this type of thinking that makes the planning process and ultimate success of a project that much more important.

Conclusion

The careful planning that pre-dates the design and construction of a college building or opening of a new service line must include a carefully constructed business plan that reflects market, financial, and organizational realities. The millions of students, faculty, and staff who benefit from university facilities/services-as well as the billions of dollars poured into these facilities/services each year-are too important to abandon a planning approach that helps ensure each facility and operation will serve its expected purpose. ↻



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