

Building Solutions

A Facility Director's First 100 Days

Embarking on a new role as a facility director for an educational institution is an exciting yet challenging journey. The secret to success lies in looking at the campus environment, understanding its daily operations, and aligning with school leadership expectations. Let's review a few suggestions for your first 100 days in your new position.

To kick off, spend the first 30 days observing. You will learn a lot simply walking around the campus with the goal of absorbing how it is used. Immerse yourself in daily activities, witness routines, and get to know everyone involved in the day-to-day operations. Make it a point to introduce yourself and engage in conversations with every faculty and staff member – after all, they are your real customers. Understanding campus-wide scheduling and routines is crucial for effective planning and minimizing disruptions during any improvements.

Also, sit down with key leadership figures to gain their insights for the campus vision and their historical perspective. Understand the changes they envision and seek clarity on action plans, goals for the campus, and any immediate needs. Collaborate closely with the leadership to comprehend budgetary constraints and opportunities and ensure you are familiar with related budgets and accounting department reporting. Gilbert Cruz, Facilities Manager at Strake Jesuit in Houston, TX wishes he could tell himself when he first started to “budget and stick to it. Budget monthly so you don't fall behind.”

Take the time to obtain and review campus policies and procedures, as a thorough understanding of these guidelines provides a solid foundation for decision-making and operational improvements. Identify the accountability structure across the campus, determine responsibilities and service level expectations, and establish effective lines of communication. An organization chart can be a useful tool to track this accountability structure.

Next, it's time to get to know your staff. Arrange a formal team meeting followed by one-on-one sessions to understand your team's roles. Review job descriptions, evaluate whether individuals are utilized correctly according to their experience, background, and pay scale and identify strengths and weaknesses within the team. Assess performance levels against their potential. Additionally, identify a potential 'impact' project based on conversations with facility users – a project that can fit within your budget and would signify that you listen and respond to your “customers.”

“Take a breath and realize Rome wasn't built in a day. Change takes time and love!”
Chris Johnson
Lakeland Christian School

Create a comprehensive action plan for improvements and renewals, aligning it with any existing master plan and budget. Establish clear goals for yourself and your team. Armed with an action plan and goals, take that first step towards implementing positive changes. Identify immediate needs for individuals and departments, prioritizing them based on urgency and impact. Seek permission to sit at the table with decision-makers—the staff leadership team, Finance Committee or Building and Grounds Committee of the Board. Give facilities a voice where your voice can make a difference.

Lastly, be prepared for the day-to-day challenges that come with managing a campus. Stay adaptable and address emerging needs promptly. By following these steps, facility directors can strategically navigate their new roles, fostering positive change and creating a campus environment conducive to growth and development. As Johnny Prugh, Director of Facilities Operations and Maintenance at Miami Country Day School in Miami, FL, told us best “progress, not perfection.”

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