

# COLLEGE

## Planning & Management

---

## You Can Make Your Facilities Services Provider Part of the College Community

*Here are five attributes that, when well implemented, form the framework for successful relationships between college administration and services companies.*

*by Randy Ledbetter*

Effective Integrated Facilities Services (IFS) relationships between college and university administration and services companies must go beyond typical customer/vendor transactions. A partnership must be created between college and service company management and between employees and everyone in the college community who benefits from their efforts. This close coordination requires constant attention to ensure that expectations are well understood and performance results are clear, measurable and acceptable to all parties.

The following five attributes are necessary for accomplishing that goal. Each is important in its own right but, when taken together, they form a framework for success. None of them is unusual or surprising to administrators. However, they all have to be coordinated in order for IFS to realize its full potential.

### Reporting Relationships

A strong partnership begins with well-defined reporting relationships within each organization. Responsibilities and interactions among different levels of administration must be well defined. If reporting structures are unclear in either the college or contractor organizations (or subcontractors, for that matter), the relationships between the organizations are muddy. In order to have an effective IFS partnership, each party must define where the points of interaction exist, and who has the authority and responsibility to manage operations and oversee employees.

For instance, maintenance grounds and academic housekeeping services might report to Facilities Management, while the housekeeping function in residence halls might report through a residence life administrative chain. All activities would be coordinated through a contract administrator or a senior level manager.

It's important that the employees and line administration have short, clear reporting chains, while senior administration is responsible for strategically controlling their own organizations.

### Quality of Service Measures

Of equal importance are Quality of Service (QoS) considerations. These also must be negotiated up-front so expectations on both sides are grounded in reality and specified in the Service Level Agreement (SLA). QoS begins with a good baseline analysis. The contract administrator and the contractor must agree on performance metrics for the term of the contract. Once baseline levels are identified, the contractor and the administrator must negotiate acceptable performance improvement measures. By establishing these metrics, the relationship is built around continuous improvement of people, processes and technology to reduce costs and enhance customer satisfaction. Naturally, all of this requires formal measurement procedures.

### Formal Reports and Reviews

IFS relationships require constant interac-

Photos courtesy UNICCO



*The IFS contractor's human resources policies and practices must reflect the values of the college or university for two reasons.*



*Effective quality of service begins with a good baseline analysis.*

tion between clients and service provider teams to facilitate frequent feedback. A popular and effective way to measure facilities services results is to conduct user surveys.

Survey faculty, staff, students, alumni and even parents to gauge their opinions of the facilities. A good time to do this is at, or after, events, such as September back-to-classes activities, homecoming or parents' weekend. These surveys are helpful in determining longer-term (year-to-year) perceptual improvements.

There is a need for quantitative reports that address the goals established in the SLA. The evaluation must be supported by regularly scheduled contractor and contract administrator reports that detail performance both as a "snapshot" at a point in time and as a trend based on previous feedback. Typically, this is done by contractor and college administration inspection walk-throughs (preferably together) with evaluation sheets that address all of the performance metrics identified in the SLA.

Although an accepted industry practice, the clipboard technique makes it difficult to consolidate information and analyze trends. Advanced IFS contractors are now turning to automated data collection systems using portable palmtop devices. Palmtops enable them to quickly and easily gather the data and efficiently add the information to the facilities management database to develop trend analyses and identify areas that need improvement. In this way, when services management and the contract administrator meet for periodic performance reviews, they can clearly measure performance, identify areas needing improvement and establish specific remediation programs.

faculty and administrators and become integral to their academic experience.

### Subcontractor Relations

Generally, one of the great benefits of using an integrated facilities services company is that the institution reduces the number of service vendor relationships. Often, the services provider uses subcontractors for specialized trades and services. Performance parameters should be specified in the SLA that specify pre-established standards for the subcontractors.

The service provider must be able to manage two types of subcontractor relations. The first is with the college's established vendors. The college or university may have contractual arrangements with existing contractors or may, because of exemplary service in the past, prefer to retain the services of a subcontractor rather than leave it to the IFS provider's discretion. Second, the service company must have strong relations with specialist contractors, such as HVAC, elevator and other special equipment, and be able to effectively manage them. The facilities services provider must have the management strength to live up to its commitments through subcontractors.

Selecting an IFS vendor is not simply a purchasing decision. Certainly, cost must be weighed against the benefits of outsourcing critical tasks. However, the IFS employees become part of the community and interact with students, faculty and administrators daily. Model IFS implementations are built on strong partnerships where everyone has realistic expectations, well-defined goals and a mutual interest in success.

*Randy Ledbetter is vice president of facilities business development for UNICCO Service Company in Auburndale, Mass. UNICCO can be reached at <marketing@unicco.com> or <www.unicco.com>.*



*A popular and effective way to measure facilities services results is to conduct user surveys.*

### Employee Relations

The operations management and performance reviews are certainly important, but everything revolves around people. The IFS contractor's human resources policies and practices must be well-defined and adhere to all employment laws as well as, when appropriate, union regulations. They must also reflect the values of the college or university for two reasons: first, an IFS contractor is an extension of the community and must reflect the values of that community; and second, IFS employees often interact with students,

# UNICCO

INTEGRATED FACILITIES SERVICES®

**www.unicco.com**

**888-751-9100**