Appendix B: Project Intent Workshop

The Project Intent workshop is composed of the following steps:

- Develop the Questions
- Organize the Workshop
- Convene the Workshop
- Transform the Results
- Present the Results
- Update the Procedures

Develop the Questions

The questions for the workshop need to be broad in nature in order to elicit discussion among the workshop attendees. In addition, a broad question is more likely to obtain a variety of viewpoints and not lead the attendees in a single direction. Therefore, careful consideration of the question content and wording is required.

The development of questions first requires the topic areas to be identified. For schools, the general topics would include educational environment, safety, and durability. In order to provide guidance in the development of questions for the workshop, examples are provided below for facility uses, occupant comfort, and project success.

- Facility uses – the purpose of this question is to understand the use of the facility from the perspective of all its users.

  Three questions that could be asked to obtain this information are:

  a) What do you do in the facility?
  b) What are the functional requirements of this facility?
  c) What equipment is in the facility?

  Question A is too narrow in that it focuses the workshop attendees only on their particular area or use of the facility and does not look at the facility as a whole. An example problem that would occur if this question is used would be ignoring the common areas. The attendees focus so much on their own areas and what they do, they forget about the synergies between the different groups. Question C is even worse. Asking about what equipment is in the facility does not get to the functionality of the facility.

  Question B is the one to ask. All facilities have functional uses that must be provided in order for the organization (occupants) to be successful. Keeping the question broad, and even a little vague, enables the workshop attendees to fill in the blank using their knowledge and perspective. For example, it is not necessary to provide a definition of functional use of a facility. However, an analogy is often appropriate (e.g., some of the functional uses of a fast food restaurant are preparation area, ordering area, eating area, restroom, and storage).

- Occupant comfort – the purpose of this question is to determine how the occupants of the facility define their comfort.

  Three questions that could be asked to obtain this information are:

  a) At what temperature are you comfortable?
  b) What conditions are important to your comfort in an ideal facility?
  c) Do you dress differently in the summer versus winter?

  Again Question A is too narrow in that it focuses the attendees only on one aspect of comfort.

  Allowing the attendees to define comfort on their own terms often results in unique responses designers and commissioning authorities never think of. One such example is when operations and maintenance staff are asked Question B. Their response often is not a particular temperature or humidity value, but is "The phone does not ring". This shows the importance of not trying to lead the discussion in the workshop. The reason the term "ideal facility" is used is to focus the attendees on what they want and not what is wrong with their current facility.

Question C is obviously too narrow as it only allows for a yes/no answer and no opportunity for interaction among the attendees.

- Project success – the purpose of this question is to determine how the different team members will define a successful project upon occupancy.

  Three questions that could be asked to obtain this information are:

  a) What must be accomplished for a successful project?
  b) What must be accomplished to maintain budget/schedule?
  c) What must be done to avoid change orders?

  Sometimes the most direct question is the best question. It is amazing how seldom the simple question of what is required for a successful project is asked. Designers and contractors typically assume that if they meet the budget or schedule and minimize change orders that the client will be happy. While these may be important aspects from the finance officer's perspective, the occupants just want everything working from day one, to be comfortable, and to enjoy coming to work, whereas the operations and maintenance staff want to be properly trained, have good documentation, and to be able to easily find, access, and maintain the systems.

The questions typically used for our Project Intent workshops include:

1. What are the functional requirements of this facility?
2. What conditions are important to your comfort in an ideal facility?
3. What activities generate pollutants in this facility?
4. How will you benchmark the operation of the facility?
5. What can be done to make this facility more sustainable?
6. What problems with previous projects should be avoided?
7. What must be accomplished for a successful project?

Organize the Workshop

There are two key aspects of organizing the workshop: who to invite and how long should it be?

Who to invite is easy to answer – any group that will interface and interact with the facility and its use must be involved in the workshop. For example, for a typical school this would not only include the principal, vice principal, and operations and maintenance staff, but would also include administration staff, teachers, students, community groups, and parents – essentially anyone who will use the facility or is responsible for its operation. The difficult part is identifying the particular individual who will represent a particular group. This person must be knowledgeable of the group's activities and needs, be able to speak for the group, and to communicate the results of the workshop and the Project Intent document back to their group. The best person often is not the manager of the group, but a line worker who deals with day-to-day problems the manager is unaware of. The difficulty is getting the manager to empower a representative and supporting this person in the workshop team's decisions.

Since it is important to obtain as many viewpoints as possible, if the design or construction contractors have been hired, they should be invited to the workshop. This would include the architect, engineers, specialists, general contractor, sub contractors, and key manufacturers. **However, it is important that the design architect or engineer not be the facilitator as they need to be a participant of the workshop.**

Experience has shown that each question takes approximately 30 minutes to complete, ranging from 20 minutes to 45 minutes depending upon the number of attendees, the number of responses, and the discussion. For small facilities ($10 million and below), a half-day workshop is usually sufficient to obtain the key criteria. An additional half-day workshop is typically held with just the operations and maintenance staff to discuss the issues of training, documentation, and specific system requirements. For larger projects, a workshop is typically held with all of the key user groups to determine the facility requirements. Then, separate workshops may be convened with each major group to define that group's needs. Therefore, the workshop can last anywhere from one day to typically no more than five days.

Part of the organization effort is to invite the attendees to the workshop. The facility owner should do this in order to show the importance of this workshop. In the invitation, the attendee should be told the location, length of the workshop, and the basic structure. However, it is critical that the attendees not be given the questions ahead of time. By allowing the attendees to think about their answers, they become stubborn and believe only their response is the correct one. By providing the question and then obtaining responses immediately during the workshop, the attendees are open to all responses, resulting in the best possible group consensus.

Convene the Workshop

One item to keep in mind when convening the workshop is that attendees work harder and provide more interaction when they are comfortable. Therefore, selection of the workshop location must consider the room layout, comfort of the chairs, the lighting, ambient noise, and temperature control. In addition, food and drinks need to be provided, along with breaks to enable the group to interact between the questions.

In preparation of the workshop, several items need to be produced and brought to the workshop. These include:

1. Agenda – the agenda should include the time, place, invitees, and the key topics. However, the actual questions should not be shown, only Questions A, B, etc. The reason for this is to avoid having the attendees thinking about the future questions.

2. Sign-in sheet – the sign-in sheet should include the project name and date of the workshop and space for the attendees' name and e-mail (to send out results).

3. Pre-printed flip charts – Use PostIt™ flip charts, as these are easy to place on the walls and remove at the end of the workshop, and do not bleed through. Depending upon the expected size of the workshop, you will need between 4 and 5 flipcharts (60-75 response spaces). The first flipchart includes the questions and responses 1 through 15. The second flipchart includes responses 16 through 30, etc.

4. Attendee response forms – these are double-sided sheets, with the question and space for the attendees name, organization/department, and responses on the front, and the question and ranking table on the back.

The workshop is facilitated (not led) by the Commissioning Authority. In this role, the Commissioning Authority presents the questions, watches the time, records the responses, keeps anyone from dominating the discussion, and summarizes the results. For each question, the following procedure is used:

- Commissioning Authority states the question – In stating the question, the Commissioning Authority may need to provide analogies to get the attendees started. However, it is important to not lead the attendees to only a few answers. Therefore, for any guidance given, a different facility type should be used – if the project is a school, a fast food restaurant might be used as the example.

- Quiet response time (approximately 5 minutes) – The quiet response time where the individual attendees write down there responses on a piece of paper is important. This time enables the individuals to think of responses and essentially purge themselves of any possible response. It is important to not judge any response and consider that "all" responses are valid.

- Record individual responses on a flip chart with no discussion (approximately 10 minutes) – The recording of the individual responses on a flip chart without discussion is important in that it prevents one person from dominating. It is critical that the Commissioning Authority goes from attendee to attendee and only obtain one response at a time. Once each attendee has provided one response, start over from the beginning to get a second response. This continues until all responses are obtained and documented. Even if a response appears to be similar to a previously recorded answer, avoid the urge to combine them at this step. By combining answers, the Commissioning Authority is introducing bias into the process. Additionally, not having any discussion provides the opportunity for shy individuals to provide their input, as they will not be questioned or ridiculed for "wrong" answers. It is recommended to mix up the starting position and direction of obtaining responses so that each person gets to go near the start or near the end of a round.

- Discuss the responses (approximately 5 to 10 minutes) – Once all the responses are recorded, the group reviews the responses one by one. This is where responses are grouped together and clarification is provided on what an item means. If the attendees think of additional responses during the discussion (this often happens), they are recorded. It is important for the Commissioning Authority to keep the discussion on the topic and not get mired down in politics or past history. The goal of the workshop is to identify the needs of the new project, not past ones.

- Individual ranking of the top 5 responses (approximately 5 minutes) – Once all attendees understand all of the responses, each attendee is asked to choose and rank their top five responses. Sometime during the workshop, the Commissioning Authority should state that all responses will be used in the development of the Project Intent. The ranking of the items is for the purpose of focusing the design and construction teams on the key criteria.

To properly facilitate the Project Intent Workshop requires three people – the Commissioning Authority as the facilitator, a chart recorder, and a computer recorder. The chart recorder allows the Commissioning Authority to focus on maintaining control of the workshop and ensures the process is followed. Further, the chart recorder strictly records each response as stated by the attendee or summarized by the Commissioning Authority. The computer recorder enters the information into the spreadsheet so that the results can be presented to the attendees at the completion of the workshop.

Transform the Results

Obtaining information from the workshop attendees is the simple part. The hard part is transforming these criteria into the Project Intent document. For the Commissioning Process to be successful, the Project Intent must contain criteria that are measurable, verifiable, and documentable. Vague and undefinable criteria will frustrate the design and construction team and result in them ignoring the Project Intent document. Therefore, in developing the Project Intent document after the completion of the workshop, the Commissioning Authority must work with the entire commissioning team (workshop attendees).

For example, Table 1 provides the top ten responses to the question of how the attendees define comfort. As can be seen in the table, the responses are varied and cover relatively broad categories. It is the responsibility of the Commissioning Authority to expand these to clear and concise criteria. Even a simple response such as "view to outdoors" requires a better definition. Is this from the seated or standing position, should certain rooms not have views, and what entails a good or bad view? Therefore, the translation of the criteria takes a significant amount of time, iterative reviews by the various parties, and the knowledge of the Commissioning Authority.