



Achieving savings – and trust – through competence

At Texas A&M University, the Texas-size pride in “Aggieland” is obvious - starting with the sea of 50,000 maroon-clad students going to classes each day in College Station. As visitors cross campus, students greet them with a warm “HOWDY.”

When state funding shortfalls drove campus administrators to look to outsourcing custodial, grounds, maintenance and construction management services in 2012, there was widespread concern about the impact of outsourcing on the “Aggie Family” culture.

Tell Butler, Director of Facilities at Dwight Look College of Engineering/TEES and administrator of about 10% of the 23 million square foot campus, acknowledges that winning people’s trust takes time, and he says that SSC is accomplishing this through hard work and competence.

Butler described the culture at Texas A&M as “one that lends itself to having to exercise a certain trust factor. Once somebody proves their competency, then people are usually very cooperative.”

Butler himself is convinced that SSC is on the right track. “I would say across the board it has been a very favorable situation,” he said.

MAKING THE DECISION

As one of the largest universities in the country with 23 million square feet and over 50,000 students, this Tier 1 research university boasts first-rate academic facilities and a passionate, tight-knit community. Selecting a provider posed a challenge for the University.

The University organized a strong committee of students, faculty and staff to carefully consider proposals from the strongest companies in the industry. After thoughtful deliberation, site visits and interviews, Texas A&M selected SSC, a division of Compass Group, to assume facilities services and sister company Chartwells to provide dining services.

SSC is now responsible for custodial, grounds, maintenance, and University construction. SSC employs a team of 30 Aggie on-site project managers who

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complete some 700 projects each year, ranging from small renovations to full-floor remodels and new construction up to \$10 million per project. In addition, SSC offered positions to over 850 in-house staff across custodial, grounds and maintenance.

Beyond the day-to-day responsibilities, SSC also staffs, prepares, and cleans up after campus events like football games, which can draw upwards of 250,000 people to the campus. This requires close work with many campus departments.

PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST

One of the reasons why SSC was selected over more than 10 other companies for the facilities contract is that they share the University's commitment to treating people fairly—starting with transitioning the existing staff when the partnership began. SSC offered every transitioned employee a 4% pay raise and paycheck credit to offset any small out-of-pocket differences between health and retirement plans.

- 829 Staff transitioned to SSC.
- 178 have been promoted.
- SSC has also embraced the university's policy of hiring students and had over 60 student workers at the start of 2014.

TEXAS-SIZED TRANSITION

"Understanding and planning for the enormity and scope of the transition was critical," said SSC Vice President of Operations Bob Casagrande. "With over 800 buildings and 22 million square feet in College Station, our team has to be organized for success every day."

Daily startup progress meetings among the 25 lead managers were key. SSC Division President Seth Ferriell remained closely involved, and helped the team identify and implement opportunities like:

- Rearranging schedules and adding afternoon and weekend shifts, enabling employees to work more efficiently and respond more quickly.
- Reassigning some employees to new positions where they could excel.
- Improving work order handling for more rapid response time.
- Consolidating vehicle use—reducing vehicle costs by 30%—and reconfiguring work zones around railroad tracks on campus so employees are not delayed for long periods waiting for trains to pass.
- Renegotiating contracts with outside vendors to significantly reduce costs.
- Training staff to perform services previously contracted out, for instance in ammonia systems and autoclave maintenance. This saves money and reduces response time.

The team focused on communication and relationships on campus:

- SSC has attended and presented at facility manager meetings, which bring Texas A&M managers from different areas together to share ideas and camaraderie.
- SSC established the "High Five Award" to recognize outstanding employee performance by hanging a concrete tile with an imprint of the employee's hand in the lobby of the Facilities Services Building.
- SSC regularly communicates with customers on the status of work order

requests, which Butler says, "makes things work well for people who are waiting for something to be completed."

BY THE NUMBERS

Performance results, meanwhile, are being widely realized, with a 20% savings over previous years' facility spend. The savings are being redirected to research and teaching, and the efficiency gains have been noticeable.

- A backlog of 4,630 work orders was alleviated over the first six months, and progress is continuing with improved response and repair times.
- \$7.3 million is being invested in new equipment.
- Campus curb appeal programs have improved the grounds landscaping in a cost-conscious manner, utilizing student designs and native and sustainable plantings.
- In addition to the over 800 staff that joined SSC in College Station, SSC integrated close to 900 additional support services staff at 16 A&M system regional campuses throughout Texas after the university exercised the option to include the rest of the system in the support services agreement in February 2013.

"They want the work, they want to perform the desired services, they have to answer to somebody who is measuring their services," said Butler, who has oversight for about 10% of the campus, or 2.2 million square feet. "It's a better, more efficient performance model," he said of partnering with SSC.