



Well, you asked for it.

Planning a **Safety Assessment** and/or a **Stage Rigging Inspection** requires an understanding of a school system's goals and objectives. Typically, one of the first questions that comes-up is "**How Much will this cost?**" We get this question a lot. And as usual, the answer is "*it depends....*" As independent consultants, much of what we charge for is our time (and a few reimbursable travel expenses). The time involved in each facility assessment depends upon the complexity of the venue and equipment, and the level of inspection that is needed. In order to arrive at an estimated cost we will need to know more about your needs and the facilities.

This is an iterative process, and it usually starts much like this conversation has. As we better understand your needs and facilities we can provide you with a proposal for services that is appropriate in the scope of work defined. Two or three revisions of a proposal is par for the course. We tailor each one to the client's needs.

The idea of sharing resources between multiple venues is good. This can provide savings in the efficiency of researching and authoring the final report. All of the venues will be reported upon in one document, and this provides several key benefits:

- A general overview of all the schools provides context to show where there are systemic issues rather than viewing each school as a stand-alone case. Systemic problems must be addressed differently than individual problems.
- Travel time to and from the project area is shared across the report cost of multiple venues.
- Area venues will better understand the assets available to them relative to their own facility so they can plan for capital improvements to bring all the venues up to the same level of safety and performance capability.
- Training can be shared by all participants so that a common set of knowledge and operational parameters can be developed. This will help keep the staff and students safer as they move between venues that may have different styles of equipment and theatres.

In general, the facilities can each require from a few hours to a couple of days to make observations. An elementary school Cafetorium / Gymnasium may require 3-4 hours each (allowing 2-3 site observations per day), where a large Performing Arts Center with many support spaces can require a couple of days to review. For each hour of observations and interviews at a facility, there are several hours of report authoring associated with that. Another variable is the types of programs present at the school. If they only have one key program (like Band or Drama) then it will take less time to perform the observations and interviews than it would if there are multiple programs (like Dance, Orchestra, Band, Drama, Technical Theatre, and Choral) and numerous community users (like churches, scouts, community theatre, etc.).

Another variable is the complexity and conditions of the technical systems and buildings. An older system or facility typically has the potential for more issues to be documented, and the process of discovering the nuances of each can be slower. A newer building or system is usually easier to observe (*but not always*), and *just because they are newer does not necessarily mean that they are automatically safer*. For example: Inspecting a stage rigging system in a theatre that has a walk-on gridiron is much faster and simpler than inspecting an under-hung rigging system 40-50' in the air with a man-lift (*and a lot less scary, too!*).



Know this: Facility age does *not* correlate with facility safety. We frequently find **brand new buildings** with *serious* safety issues.

So, where do we go from here? We talk, we exchange e-mails, and we get a better understanding of what *your* facilities are, your school district's proposal and purchasing process is like, and find-out what your ultimate goals for the report are.

First things first. If you are considering having someone assess your facilities, please don't say anything that would cause staff or students to clean-up or be better organized than they typically are. It is **very important** that what we observe is *in situ* and not altered from the day-to-day operations. We need to see 'normal' - *whatever that is*. Cleaning-up can remove valuable information about the true condition of machinery and stage rigging systems. Once the observations are made, then we will typically recommend a thorough cleaning, as good housekeeping is a tool for discovering something that is 'not normal' or 'out of place' in the future. But for now, *leave it as-is*.

Decide which venues you want to assess.

For K-12 Schools we always suggest that all the campuses be included because the quality of the fine arts facilities at the lower grades directly affects the buy-in that the parents have to the fine arts programs. A good experience for them (being able to see and hear their children perform) at the lower grades will carry through to better support for the district's programs in the upper grades.

For Universities and Municipalities, we recommend that all of the performance facilities under their control be assessed at the same time. This facilitates master planning from the top-down in an objective manner.

- Safety issues in small venues *can be significant* as they are used and managed by staff that are typically unfamiliar with the equipment, procedures, and regulations that affect their operations. Unfortunately, they unintentionally create hazardous conditions in their effort to mount a wide variety of productions.
- Safety Training is every bit as important for the small venues as it is for the larger venues. The hazards present to the staff, students, and guests are very similar. A consistent understanding of safety issues and policies throughout the school or city venues is easier to manage and support.

Decide if dance rooms, band halls, choral rooms, and other performing arts spaces are to be included. It's not all about theatre. Music and dance programs can be frequent users of the main performance facilities, and how their spaces perform individually affects their interactions with the rest of the programs. Our work will look at access and equipment transfer considerations as well as acoustics and noise control characteristics for the practice and classrooms; and how storage issues of music equipment affects drama / theatre storage needs. Sometimes the big picture can be really big.

Once we get a handle on the size and types of venues to be visited, we can start to explore what will be included in the assessment proposal and develop a cost estimate. It also may be appropriate to employ us for a single day of consulting so that we can sit-down with you and your staff (and possibly the key users of the various spaces, too) so that we can all meet, walk through a sample of venue types, and help



everyone get a clear understanding of your collective needs. Our goal is to ensure that the client fully understands what they are investing in and why it is important.

What to Inspect: Street-to-the-Alley? Systems? Facilities?

Theatres are complicated machines, and safety issues abound in all areas. The safety of Guests is equally important as the safety of Staff, Students, and Volunteers. It is important that facility managers understand the unique relationships that building components have in a performing arts complex – either directly or indirectly, each and every item in the building affects the aesthetic enjoyment of the audience and the safety of all. To truly plan for facility-wide improvements, it is necessary to see it all in context.

A Street-to-the-Alley Safety Assessment looks at the myriad of items that can be precursors to potential accidents and summarizes them in a report that explains what may be dangerous, what building or safety codes address the issue (i.e. what ‘rule’ the condition may violate), and provides recommendations for the mitigation of the hazard in a manner that is sensitive to the needs of the building as a presentation space. This looks at facilities, operations, and personnel skills in the context of a public assembly venue and considers all the unique scenarios that can transpire before, during, and after an event. Life safety aspects of the report covers numerous elements like fire safety, electrical safety, chemical hazards, fall hazards, lighting issues, tool safety, PPE, and training.

A System Safety Assessment looks at specific production systems, sound, lighting, rigging, etc., and focuses the report on the components in that system. Common focused inspections are Stage Rigging Systems (recommended annually under ANSI standards), Fire Curtain Systems (required annually under the commonly adopted NFPA codes), and Smoke Vents (also required annually under the commonly adopted NFPA codes). Electrical Safety and Fall Protection Safety issues are also frequently addressed.

A System Assessment is an operational and functional evaluation of a system to see if it meets the teaching and presentation needs of the schools programs. This report discusses the impact that the facility tools have on the ability to teach skills, present learning opportunities, and the suitability of the technology to the current and future presentation needs of the users and audience. It may include commentary on ADA related issues or Staff Training needs, too. This can be helpful for planning both short term improvements and long-term scheduled replacement funding.

A Facility Assessment is a review of the building layout and condition within the context of its use as a Fine Arts training space and a community entertainment venue. This can be useful for planning building renovations, bond program planning, and major maintenance upgrades. Common areas studied in this type of evaluation is Noise Control, Room Acoustics, ADA compliance, Space Planning for production support spaces like Dressing Rooms, Costume Shops, and supplementary storage additions. Additionally, the aesthetic and intangible elements are considered that affect the communities perception of the facility and operations.

The Next Step:

Let’s talk. We can help you define your needs so that your facilities receive the attention that is appropriate to their condition and the user’s needs.

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