



How to Maintain Your Museum on a Penny-Pinching Budget

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If you're like most museum managers, you're passionate about your exhibits and creating exceptional experiences for visitors. But lots of things distract from that passion: financial pressures and everyday headaches associated with maintaining the facility itself. How can you focus on the museum's mission and still keep the facility in tip-top shape when you feel like you're pulled in many directions and constantly pinching pennies?

It's a sad state of affairs when museums have to sell art or artifacts to cover costs. This practice of deaccessioning is frowned upon. "But," the Smithsonian reports, "as museums face down debt, budget cuts and fears for the future, they're increasingly looking to their valuable collections as a potential means of survival."



Your “real” job is creating business plans to address curating, research, staffing, financials, attendance, and events. It’s easy to overlook the fact that staying on top of maintenance is vital, even when the budget is tight. If building maintenance becomes a low priority, an onslaught of problems can result. Consider the long-term costs of these issues, for example:

- Inefficient HVAC systems or premature failure of parts or equipment
- Permanent stains on carpets, marble floors, and other surfaces
- Use of damaging cleaning chemicals or improper cleaning methods
- An unpleasant environment (smells, mold, dust, bad lighting, peeling painting, dirty restrooms, understaffed events, etc.) causing patrons to stay away

Museums aren’t the only ones with financial headaches. These days, what business doesn’t need to save money, free up capital, and eliminate distractions? What can a museum learn by looking at how large successful companies handle budget constraints? One strategic move is to outsource services—such as facility engineering and housekeeping—that do not directly support the core business function. In a 2016 Deloitte worldwide survey,

59% of executives believe outsourcing offers an opportunity to save costs. It can also lead to reduced energy use, an improved indoor environment, and a more attractive facility. It's an efficient way to keep the building running optimally and looking its best, while you focus on your priorities.

The good news is, there are facility services companies with expertise in the maintenance of museums and their special environments. These experts can efficiently and cost effectively handle housekeeping, preventative maintenance, interior and exterior upkeep, HVAC systems, event support, landscaping, etc. The advantages of hiring such a partner are many:

Cost savings: This alone can be a sufficient reason for museums to outsource. Retaining in-house employees is a costly endeavor. In-house facility services personnel do not directly contribute to a museum's core functions, yet require the same administrative oversight for payroll taxes, salaries, and benefits. The cost of tools and equipment, management, and training can put a further strain on funds. Outsourcing allows you to control operating costs and establish a budget, freeing up capital for other important expenditures or investments. A facility services provider has the expertise to prudently manage a maintenance budget without cutting corners on quality.

Flexibility: Another word for this is scalability. An outsourcing partner can easily adjust the level of staffing for special events or seasonal fluctuations in attendance, essentially becoming an extension of your team. This helps control operating costs and avoids the time-consuming process of recruiting, hiring, training and possibly re-training personnel.

Special care: A facility service provider that specializes in museum environments will know how to work around exhibits, how to interact with your visitors, and how to maintain HVAC and lighting systems optimally to safeguard your collections and keep patrons comfortable. Trained engineers, janitors, and other service workers will protect the value of your building, furnishings, and other assets.

The importance of proper housekeeping can't be ignored. For example, brooms and mops cannot be propped against a wall when not in use—janitors must lay them safely on the floor. As you may well know, if a broom handle pokes a hole in a painting, it could take nearly your whole budget to repair the canvas. Other special maintenance considerations include placing sandbags under the wheels of rolling carts or other equipment to prevent accidental bumping into artwork or exhibits.

With each person who enters the museum comes dirt, dust, pollen, lint, and hair that travels throughout. Well-trained janitors will take pride in their jobs and keep an attentive eye out for spots and stains on floors, walls, and windows—anything that detracts from your exhibits and the visitor experience. Restrooms must be kept pristine, and spills or other accidents in public areas must be addressed immediately and without disrupting your crowds. Environmentally safe chemicals and cleaning processes are necessary to protect the air quality and your valuable assets.

If your museum cannot be cleaned at night for security reasons, cleaning may need to be done by day porters in a short window before the museum opens. And day porters who are onsite during visiting hours must look neat and professional, wearing uniforms and serving as museum ambassadors, answering visitors'

questions about the building, the collection, etc. If you already have trusted janitors, they can often be integrated into the outsourced team and professionally trained in safe and efficient processes, so you no longer have to manage service workers or worry about them.

Preventative maintenance can also be key to protecting the museum's assets and budget. This is especially true for HVAC systems, which must be kept running properly to control humidity, dust, and mold that can harm exhibits. A facility services company can send in trained engineers who understand the sophisticated HVAC systems that are crucial to art and artifact preservation and normally maintained by any in-house staff you already have. Periodic cleaning tasks also save money in the long run and keep things looking pristine. For example, once-a-year deep cleaning, restoration and/or sealing of stone or wood floors keeps them looking great, eliminates costly repairs, and extends their lives. Painting can give everything a fresh look, while preventing rust and deterioration.

Sustainability: Green cleaning and other sustainable practices are important to our planet's health, as well as the health of people in the building. Reducing your carbon footprint is possible through energy savings and recycling programs—options that an integrated facility services provider will help you explore and implement. Many such programs fund themselves through savings realized, so you can make improvements without impacting your budget.

Making your budget last as long as possible is never easy, but wise spending on facility services will give you more “bang for your buck,” with benefits resulting from:

1. Elimination of operational issues so you can focus on budget management, programming, and delighting patrons.
2. Deployment of trained temporary staffing for ensuring your events are successful.
3. Implementation of innovative solutions that support the museum's revenue growth and improve efficiencies.

As you know, running a museum keeps you running. It requires keen attention to a multitude of important details—worrying about who is tending to the facility's needs shouldn't be one of them. A reputable facility services company will allow you to rest easy, knowing your property will be cared for in the most professional, cost-efficient manner. The right partner also knows the importance of a collaborative culture: “We're all here for the same reason.” Their team will become a part of your team, and their employees will work seamlessly with your staff, whether behind the scenes or in public-facing activities. Outsourcing to a museum expert can be invaluable to your bottom line, your visitors' enjoyment, and your peace of mind.



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