Strengthening Your Capital Planning Decisions Through Facility Self-Assessment

VFA

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ABSTRACT

- Facility managers and planners need detailed knowledge of their mission-critical facilities to ensure they are properly maintained. But how do they acquire this essential insight in a time of tightening budgets? A growing number of organizations have discovered that self-assessment solutions help them consistently and cost-effectively obtain facility condition information and make better informed capital planning decisions.

Introduction

To make smart and successful capital planning decisions, organizations need a complete understanding of current building system conditions and requirements. They need insight into their short-term and long-term needs, or important facility assets could fall into disrepair. The risk is that organizations do not allocate their limited resources wisely or they incur unplanned remediation expenses that further stress already constrained budgets.

To reconcile budgetary pressures with strategic concerns, organizations have embraced self-assessment. Self-assessment empowers organizations to close the loop on portfolio knowledge gaps and gain immediate insight into their most pressing facility needs. Web-based survey platforms enable them to standardize data collection and survey reporting in a cost-effective way. Best practice methodologies and built-in guidance enable both experts and non-experts to capture information in the field that will support capital planning and preventive maintenance decisions.

Self-assessment solutions do not replace a professional Facility Condition Assessment (FCA) and are not intended to yield the same level of detail and accuracy. However, a self-assessment solution allows organizations to use their own staff to gather relevant, approximate information on facility portfolio assets at a fraction of the cost of an FCA. Self-assessment data provides quick, affordable budgetary estimates. This enables organizations to focus an FCA on mission-critical buildings that are most in need of attention, rather than conduct detailed assessments of an entire portfolio.

Advanced self-assessment platforms enable facility managers and planners to capture information in a rigorous, reliable and consistent fashion. Rather than relying on spreadsheets and unstructured documents, facility managers and planners can aggregate relevant information in a central repository that is available to all key stakeholders. The information necessary to make key decisions about capital planning and facility maintenance becomes accessible and actionable, whether facilities are concentrated on a single campus or geographically dispersed.

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Core Applications of Facility Self-Assessment

There are several ways organizations are now using self-assessment to strengthen capital planning and facility management decisions. Among them:

Identifying "Hot Spots." For many reasons, it is not always feasible or desirable to conduct a complete FCA of an entire portfolio. At the same time, planners and managers need accurate information to prioritize capital spending. Self-assessment has become a cost-effective method for helping with that prioritization. For instance, facility managers can use self-assessment to indentify "hot spots" within a facility asset portfolio. They can then determine which facilities will require a professionally conducted FCA. That may amount to just 15 to 20% of the portfolio. This knowledge enables decision makers to focus on mission-critical buildings, especially those that are in the worst condition. Knowing which assets are likely to

need immediate attention saves facility managers valuable time and money. In contrast, organizations that lack this insight find it much more challenging to make rigorous and effective capital planning decisions.

Quick, Cost-effective Budget Estimates. In addition to identifying "hot spots," self-assessment is invaluable for quick budgetary estimates. While not as accurate as a professionally conducted FCA, organizations use the data collected via self-assessment to provide more accurate budget estimates than those based on spreadsheets or stale data. With more accurate data available, facility managers can secure the right funding, respond faster to budget inquiries and funding requests, and make smarter capital planning decisions.

FCA Complement to "Divide and Conquer." Many organizations use a "divide and conquer" strategy of focusing on their most mission-critical facilities. Tight budgets often necessitate this strategy, but it often leads to overlooking large segments of a portfolio because some buildings are considered lower priorities. However, even lower priority assets incur costs and can become liabilities if neglected. With this in mind, organizations use self-assessment to capture data on all building assets, rather than just a subset of higher priority facilities. Mission-critical buildings will still warrant a regular professional FCA, but organizations use self-assessment to complement FCAs and cost-effectively capture data on the remainder of their assets. Using an advanced platform, organizations can capture this data in a standardized, consistent manner and store it in a central repository. By eliminating "knowledge gaps" and ensuring they capture data on all facility assets, organizations take an essential step in maintaining the portfolio and prioritizing actions.

Data Maintenance to Avoid "Stale" Data. Given that facility condition is constantly changing, it's important to keep information on building assets up to date. Advanced platforms for self-assessment enable organizations to easily reassess condition and maintain existing data. An advanced self-assessment platform – assuming it is easy to use and quick to deploy – promotes more frequent facility surveys, which leads to less "stale" data and results in better planning. In addition, consistent data collection enables facility managers to validate that previously captured deficiencies have been addressed. Field assessors also capture system lifecycle data to ensure accurate management of automated renewal requirements.

By closing the gaps in portfolio knowledge and providing immediate insight into their most pressing facility needs, self-assessment solutions help ensure that organizations fully optimize and protect their facility assets.

The Self-Assessment Solution

Advanced Self-Assessment Survey Platforms enable facility managers and planners to consistently and cost-effectively capture facility data that supports capital planning and preventive maintenance decisions. Self-assessment solutions help close the gaps in portfolio knowledge and provide immediate insight into the most pressing facility needs. They help organizations across vertical markets fully maximize and protect their facility investments.

Advanced solutions have several core dimensions. First, they incorporate a standardized, consistent data collection process designed for facility management resources. Second, they are designed to capture both condition and non-condition building data. This includes insight on systems lifecycle, asset deficiency and other factors that are relevant to decision-making. Third, they leverage the domain expertise of FCA specialists. This is important to help guide users through building system data collection. Most importantly, leading solutions will incorporate a combination of embedded facility assessor expertise and integration with building system and deficiency model libraries. This functionality provides a content-rich application and empowers organizations with the ability to capture relevant data from both expert and non-expert users.

The actual surveys usually address both general building conditions and more specific concerns as needed. Building condition surveys tend to focus on system lifecycle and facility deficiency data. Such surveys might focus on identifying facility "hot spots." In addition to "hot spots," they can also capture data on all major systems and components. Such efforts, moreover, help organizations develop portfolio-wide budgets. By contrast, custom surveys are tailored to address specific data collection requirements. They might reflect key business drivers such as Fire/Life Safety, regulatory or corporate brand compliance, sustainability, or risk management.

Organizations that adopt self-assessment solutions benefit in several ways. An advanced self-assessment platform enables an organization to:

- Gain immediate insight into facility requirements across its portfolio
- Quickly capture mission-critical asset details such as facilities condition, requirements, and lifecycle renewal needs at a fraction of the cost of a full condition assessment
- Rapidly identify deficiency "hot spots" across portfolios of all types

> Self-assessment represents a compelling and effective way to realize strategic objectives in a budget-concious environment.

- Standardize the data collection process across geographically dispersed assets

- Strengthen decision-making related to capital planning and facility maintenance.

Self-assessment represents a compelling and effective way for facilities managers and planners to achieve their strategic objectives in a budget-conscious environment.

Self-Assessment in Practice

The value of an advanced self-assessment platform is best demonstrated by the many organizations that have put it into practice. Both public and private sector organizations have improved capital planning effectiveness and strengthened their decision-making with self-assessment.

An example of a Federal agency that reaped significant benefits from self-assessment is the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA). GSA is the largest manager of public real estate in America with an inventory of over 350 million square feet. More than 300 users across 11 regions rely on their self-assessment platform. The approach has helped GSA develop a multi-year plan for maintenance and forecast for reinvestment. In addition, GSA was able to determine deficiencies for all its buildings and prioritize maintenance concerns. Another Federal agency, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), utilizes self-assessment to capture building condition data across an entire spectrum of building types throughout North America.

In addition to Federal agencies, many state and local government organizations rely on self-assessment solutions. For example, the Commonwealth of Virginia - Department of General Services uses an advanced self-assessment solution for its state-wide agencies as a primary facility data collection solution. Many other state and local government agencies have utilized self-assessment surveys to empower facility and building managers to capture not only building condition, but also green, energy, and site-based/infrastructure-related asset details.

"We now have a much better view of the condition of our buildings and that helps strengthen overall decision-making."

Bill Shah
Senior Project Manager,
U.S. General Services
Administration

In the corporate market, self-assessment addresses unique challenges. For example, a Fortune 500 financial institution utilizes self-assessment to monitor corporate branding requirements in thousands of bank branches across Europe. This a valuable use of self-assessment and vitally important within an industry known for merger and acquisition activity. After a merger, applying building and brand consistency across locations helps newly acquired facilities quickly become compliant with internal standards. This contributes to the economies of scale that are the impetus for the merger.

These examples and many more demonstrate the valuable role of self-assessment. Whether a Federal agency or a bank, self-assessment gives these organizations new visibility into their asset portfolio that helps them make better-informed capital planning decisions.

What to Look for in an Advanced Self-Assessment Solution

Organizations that have successfully implemented a self-assessment solution relied on a general set of factors to guide their decisions. Important considerations when evaluating self-assessment solutions include:

- **Standardization** – Solutions should provide a consistent, repeatable data collection process. After years of trying to consolidate spreadsheets, organizations should seek a standard approach that enables rapid reporting on survey findings.
- **Empowerment of Existing Resources** – Organizations should be able to leverage their existing facilities expertise. It's cost-effective to deploy existing resources and rely on the knowledge and guidance embedded in the application to help those resources accurately complete surveys.
- **Rapid Deployment and Updates** – Look for quick deployment to users and automated record collection. This is more efficient and saves time

consolidating captured data. Users should be able to assign surveys, complete them and rapidly identify any key concerns or deficiencies.

- **Streamlined Workflow** – Facility managers should be able to schedule data collection resources and validate what has been captured.

- **Software as a Service (SaaS)** – A SaaS-based solution is faster and simpler to deploy and requires no capital expense. It requires minimal IT support and users can access it from anywhere via a standard Web browser.

- **Organization-wide Extensibility** – Look for a solution that can be quickly deployed and made available to the entire organization. The introduction of a standardized platform and standard data collection processes across the enterprise will lead to superior reporting, analysis and decision-making.

Conclusion: Smarter Platforms, Smarter Planning

Facility planners and managers can now close the knowledge gaps that have previously undermined capital planning and facility management. They will continue to rely on professional Facility Condition Assessments to obtain the most thorough and accurate insight into key facility assets, however, they now have a powerful tool to cost-effectively expand and upgrade their data collection processes and enhance overall decision-making.

A growing number of organizations across vertical markets have adopted self-assessment platforms. Their successes demonstrate that self-assessment is an essential tool for maximizing and protecting the value of their facility assets.

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About VFA, Inc.

Headquartered in Boston, VFA, Inc. is the leading provider of end-to-end solutions for facilities capital planning and spend management. VFA solutions uniquely combine facility assessment services, Web-based software, and business consulting services to enable customers to manage every stage of the capital asset lifecycle — from requirements gathering and long-term planning to capital budget creation and spend management. More than 500 organizations in corporate, education, government and healthcare markets have relied on VFA solutions to strategically manage their capital assets. VFA's flagship software product, VFA.facility®, is currently used to manage more than three billion square feet of real estate.

VFA.Auditor is a web-based software solution designed to help facility managers, maintenance personnel, and others who may lack expertise in facility assessment consistently and cost-effectively gather accurate information about facilities condition and requirements.

For more information, please call 800-693-3132 or visit www.vfa.com.

To learn how you can benefit from a self-assessment strategy, download your resource kit:

http://www.vfa.com/auditor2/

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