

OUTSOURCING GROUNDS MAINTENANCE SERVICES

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One of the major items that must be considered when planning the construction of a sports field is the aftercare and day-to-day maintenance. The sports field facility manager must consider the amount of use, equipment and manpower needs, budget limits and levels of service to be provided. Often this leads to a considerable investment. Rather than hiring new employees and obtaining new or specialized equipment, some facilities have found it to be cost effective to outsource some or all of their grounds maintenance services.

Outsourcing grounds maintenance services gives the sports field manager certain advantages. The primary reason for outsourcing is that it saves money. It is far less expensive to hire an outside service provider to provide an infrequent task using specialized equipment than to own the equipment and have it unproductive most of the year. Another consideration is that any new equipment must be stored somewhere and possibly transported to the work site, adding additional overhead and capital expenses. Payroll is usually one of the largest line item expenses. By outsourcing certain recurring tasks (such as mowing), labor and benefits costs can be more effectively managed.

Outsourcing simplifies and streamlines the basic operations. It allows the sports field manager to *delegate* certain tasks to an outside service provider and concentrate on the *management* of his or her sports field facility, rather than become mired in details. By eliminating certain distractions, outsourcing allows the sports field manager time to concentrate on core activities. Outsourcing allows the sports field manager an opportunity to focus on *performance* and allows the operation more *flexibility* if change is needed.

Outsourcing is only the provision of a service that can be contracted for, not the outcome¹. The ultimate accountability will always rest with the management¹. But, service providers become partners, bringing a creative approach and technical expertise to the table². They also share some of the risk. Because outsourcing relationships are results oriented, management role is now “what” issues, not “how” issues².

Outsourcing does have its disadvantages. The sports field manager could lose control of the process or lose focus on the core business and focus instead on the outsourcing process; resulting in poor performance or quality. There is a possibility of creating poor morale within your organization as current employees view the

shift to outsourcing as an insult or a threat, possibly resulting in the loss of valuable, talented people. Your service provider could go out of business, or become too busy with other work and dilutes your service.

If outsourcing seems like a viable option for your situation, here are some Tips for Success:

1. Consider your budget, costs and needs as well as the scope of the work to be outsourced.
2. Make a strategic business decision.
3. Write clear, comprehensive contract specifications.
4. Establish a fair payment schedule.
5. Create contract administration process and structure.
6. Determine the appropriate structure of the contract document.
7. Manage the transition to the outsourced arrangement.
8. Agree to contract termination arrangements.
9. *Communicate, Communicate, Communicate*

Remember that outsourcing is a tool that works well in many situations and poorly in others. Sports field managers must identify whatever operational approach will offer the most cost effective, highest quality service and best results in a manner that is consistent with their organization's mission.

References

¹ DeStefano, S. Contracting out Your Landscape Operations, Operational Guidelines for Grounds Management

² Dunn, S. Maintenance Outsourcing-Critical Issues, www.maintenanceresources.com

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DID YOU KNOW?

Winter annuals are plants that initiate growth in the fall, live over winter, and die after producing seed the following season.