

## Focusing Your Feasibility Study for Success

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Ideally, a feasibility study sets the stage for the successful completion of a building. Too often they can end up as a pretty book that sits on a shelf, waiting for the donors that we were sure would come if they could understand the vision. While it is critical for a feasibility study to represent the vision and jump-start the fundraising process, there are some early steps that set the parameters for the study that can make the difference between a building and an office conversation piece.

In general, most feasibility studies do a reasonably good job justifying needs, and developing a concept. They examine program, site constraints and opportunities, available utilities, campus context, facility flow and adjacencies, materials, construction schedule, and perhaps most importantly, an estimate of probable project cost. So beyond having that key donor already in hand, are there things that you can do early on that increase the likelihood for your feasibility study to move beyond a dream to reality?

Yes, there are. The majority of successful studies are crafted with an understanding of both the economic position and programmatic aspirations of the institution as seen by the decision makers. Yes, a feasibility study can help garner support from those whom may have been skeptical, but fundamentally there are two ways to approach a feasibility study that must be aligned with the expectations of the campus.

**Design to the Program:** The first approach is to place a priority on the program. The study then focuses on determining what the cost will be to achieve it. This is the most typical approach, and can be successful, but can also lead to problems because of the temptation to see what the 'wish list' program will cost. We often hear comments like "this is the one shot we have, let's get all we can now and cut back later if we need to." Unfortunately, many projects can never recover from the initial sticker shock of this approach. For success, the design team and the project stakeholders should work together to make sure the program is sized appropriately for the true needs of the school. Even if the project costs end up higher than decision makers anticipated, the restraint is often recognized and it becomes easier to advance the project.

**Design to the Cost:** The second approach is to place a priority on a target project budget. While this is not as common, it can be a very successful way to advance a project quickly. Typically, this approach is taken when a dollar amount has been donated and/or allocated for a project, and the study needs to determine how much program can be built for that amount. However, a variation of this approach can be taken for almost any project. While not always shared with the design team, very often there is a preconceived budget tolerance that the decision makers have for a project. Understanding this cost tolerance can be an asset to the feasibility study process. Prioritizing the program to balance it with a preconceived cost tolerance eliminates the sticker shock when presented to decision makers. If the core program can be achieved, it makes it easier for the project to receive approval. If the program needs cannot be fully achieved for the budget, the shortcomings can be identified and a case for an increased budget can be made.

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