Perceptions of School Nutrition Directors Regarding Equipment Purchasing and Facility Design Projects

OBJECTIVES
- To identify issues impacting decisions in equipment purchasing and facility design projects.
- Describe challenges to the success of these projects, and define skills needed to execute equipment purchasing and facility design projects.

METHOD
- Expert panel consisted of state agency personnel and school nutrition (SN) directors previously identified as content experts in facility design and/or equipment purchasing.
- Expert panel members were guided through a facilitated discussion to determine their views on equipment purchasing and facility design issues.
- Survey developed from expert panel discussions.
- 21 issues impacting equipment purchasing and facility design decisions.
- 10 challenges impacting the success of equipment purchasing and facility design projects.
- Issues and challenges rated on a four-point scale – 1 (not important) to 4 (very important).
- 9 possible skills needed to execute equipment purchasing and facility design projects.
- Skills rated on a four-point scale – 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree).
- Each item rated separately for equipment purchasing and facility design.
- Program and personal characteristics.
- Survey mailed to a random sample of 1,530 SN directors stratified by USDA region.

RESULTS
- Three hundred fifty-one (33%) SN directors completed surveys.
- Almost all (98%) of SN directors were actively involved in the purchase of equipment for their program, and 98% had participated in renovations or new construction of SN facilities.
- Most SN directors reported that they had not received any formal training in facility design (79%) or equipment purchasing (72%).

ISSUES IMPACTING SN DIRECTORS’ DECISIONS ON:
- Equipment Purchasing
  - Budget (3.79 ± 0.49)
  - Efficiency (3.70 ± 0.44)
  - Food safety and sanitation (3.75 ± 0.55)
- Facility Design
  - Efficiency (3.80 ± 0.43)
  - Budget (3.79 ± 0.54)
  - Food safety and sanitation (3.71 ± 0.55)

CHALLENGES IMPACTING SUCCESS ASSOCIATED WITH:
- Equipment Purchasing Projects
  - Understanding local/state/federal codes (3.43 ± 0.69)
  - Lack of knowledge (3.40 ± 0.66)
  - Planning for flexibility (3.39 ± 0.69)
- Facility Design Projects
  - Understanding local/state/federal codes (3.47 ± 0.66)
  - Lack of knowledge (3.44 ± 0.68)
  - Planning for flexibility (3.42 ± 0.59)

SKILLS NEEDED TO EXECUTE:
- Equipment Purchasing Projects
  - Communications effectively program needs (3.65 ± 0.49)
  - Explores available equipment to meet operational needs (3.56 ± 0.53)
  - Develops appropriate specifications (3.49 ± 0.57)
- Facility Design Projects
  - Communications effectively program needs (3.60 ± 0.50)
  - Explores available equipment to meet operational needs (3.50 ± 0.54)
  - Translates operational needs based on menu (3.47 ± 0.63)

APPLICATION
- Most SN directors are actively involved in equipment purchasing and facility design projects.
- Equipment purchasing and facility design decisions are multi-faceted in nature, with numerous issues being considered for any one project.
- SN directors recognize the significance of these decisions and seek resources based on sound information to aid in formulating informed decisions.
- SN directors need resources to stay current on the constantly evolving environment of equipment and facility design industries.
- There is a need for state agencies and training professionals to provide assistance in interpreting state and federal regulations related to equipment purchasing and facility design projects.