

Seven Traps

That Can Turn Your Training
Center Into A Disaster

A SPECIAL REPORT BY:



BILL BOOTH
President

Interact Business Group

<http://www.interactbusinessgroup.com>

INTRODUCTION

As high-tech training becomes more and more imperative for public safety personnel, public safety agencies across the United States are looking increasingly to state-of-the-art training centers for their staffs. While few question the need for such facilities, assessing the cost of building and maintaining a training center is one of the biggest hurdles faced by agencies.

For nearly 15 years, the Interact Business Group has assisted public safety agencies, colleges, and universities to plan, build and operate their training facilities. Over the years, Interact has worked on many projects and gained valuable insights into what makes a project successful. Along the way we have also seen the mistakes and misdirection that have caused some projects to struggle or even fail. This booklet is based on our experience and examines the seven most common traps that can turn your training facility into a DISASTER.

TRAP Number 1—Not Knowing The Preliminary Site And Equipment Requirements

Most public safety agencies already have an idea of the land that will be used before a project is considered. But be careful to look into the future. The site being considered may be ideal today, but what about 5, 10 or even 20 years from now? Just because a site is available today it may not meet your needs in the future. Don't settle: the site location decision may be the most important decision you make. Don't make the mistake of taking land just because it is available or even free. Selecting a site that may have deficiencies in the future only serves to pass along headaches to the generations that follow. In Trap 2, not knowing how the training center will be used, we will discuss the training needs assessment. Applying the training to the site analysis is invaluable.

Another common mistake occurs in the selection of training equipment. Do not underestimate the rapidly changing world of public safety training equipment technology. Pick up any industry trade magazine and you'll see articles on interactive computer training, real-time role-playing simulations, and safe and environmentally clean materials-just to name a few.

Reach out, read and ask for help. Contact other departments. Public safety training is a close-knit community, sharing information, techniques, and lessons learned are a common and acceptable practice. If you're a member of a smaller department, don't hesitate to call one of the larger departments whose budgets allow them to stay on the leading edge of technology and travel to various trade shows. They will be honored and happy to share their experiences. Read a variety of industry magazines. For example if you are a member of a police department, read what's going on in the fire world. Many training issues are similar. Surf the Web-government Web sites are full of useful information. Or go to the relevant message forums on the Web where you'll find many excellent exchanges of questions and answers. If you see a product of interest in a magazine or on the Web, call the manufacturer and ask for more information or even a hands-on demonstration. If you're planning to attend a trade show, contact the manufacturer ahead of time and set up an appointment at the show.

TRAP 2—Not Knowing How The Training Facility Will Be Used

It sounds easy enough, but fully understanding and identifying a department's training needs and developing a comprehensive training needs assessment is challenging.

What are the legal ramifications of training? What guides your training basis—for example, Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA), Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) or National Fire Protection Association (NFPA)—and what is your responsibility to meet these directives? Do your training regiments meet the needs of any specialized needs of the community you serve—for example, senior citizen populations or is your staff prepared to meet the needs of a non-English-speaking populace? Factor into your training demands any projected staff increases. Do not plan for today and forget about tomorrow; think into the future. Take inventory of training currently being delivered and compare it with what will be needed in the future. Use government Web sites to identify possible trends in new regulations that may be under consideration. An in-depth needs assessment will help ensure that your facility is not outdated as soon as it is built.

There is a growing trend toward multiple departments sharing a training facility. So also consider these questions: How will a multiple-agency center operate on a daily basis? Will the facility be open on the weekends for public use? If so, will the public be charged a fee? How much? How will fees be collected? How do these factors affect the overall training mission?

TRAP NUMBER 3—Losing Focus On The Training Assets And Priorities At The Facility

The training facility must meet the needs you identify in the needs assessment (see Trap 2). Do not ignore the data gathered. Facility planners make a mistake when they ignore their needs data and purchase or build an asset just because it's high tech, it's the lowest cost, or the planners want to "just to get something going." Determine your highest priority facility asset based on the needs assessment. For example, if the needs assessment has indicated that the number one facility need is a drill tower for rappelling or ladder exercises, then focus on the drill tower. Don't allow yourself to be influenced by high-tech gadgets or a salesperson's aggressive sales pitch. Your priority is to accomplish the training mission, which means providing your staff with training assets that will enable them to perform their duties in the most effective and safest manner possible.

Having made the case for your highest priority training asset, you may be faced with project budget provisions. If you find that you need to make concessions in facility priorities due to budget restrictions that are out of your control, then make compromises or trade-offs accordingly. For example, perhaps your number one facility need is a drill tower but budget constraints won't allow the expenditure in the current phase of the funding. The second most needed facility asset is a computerized classroom. Pursue the computerized classroom, but don't lose sight of your number one priority—the drill tower.

TRAP NUMBER 4—Underestimating The Cost To Build The Training Facility

How much is the facility going to cost? This sounds like a simple and obvious question, but many facility projects are delayed or even cancelled due to poor financial forecasting. Surprisingly, mistakes are made on both sides of the forecast. If your estimate is too high, the project may not pass its first budget screening. If the estimate is too low, it may draw suspicion and lose credibility.

Establishing a realistic training facility cost estimate involves several key elements:

Use current and local cost estimates for construction. Consult with city planners, use tax assessments, or investigate recently completed construction projects in your area.

If the facility requires several years to complete due to budget phasing, be sure to incorporate compounded inflation factors into your estimate.

If your estimate includes the cost of specialized equipment, ask the suppliers for a rough order of magnitude (ROM) cost quote. Ask for the ROM quote in writing as this will add credibility to the estimate.

When developing the cost estimate, be sure to include any federal, state, or local taxes.

Remember to include engineering and architectural (A&E) fees in the estimate. A good rule of thumb for A&E fees is 8 to 10 percent of the construction cost.

Be aware that site and infrastructure costs are often difficult to estimate, especially if a site has not been identified. If a site has been established, be sure to address access roads, utilities, environmental fees, landscaping, fencing, paving, and parking lots. If a site has not been identified, use local resources such as city planners to guide you through the possibilities.

TRAP NUMBER 5—Falling To Establish Ongoing Annual Operations Cost

When setting up a new training facility or when enhancing an existing one, planners often fail to properly forecast the annual operations costs. Often the cost to build the facility dominates the planning process. Considerable time is spent (and rightfully so) on construction cost, site work, and equipment and furnishings, and the annual cost to operate the facility is addressed as an afterthought or given little serious attention. After the grand opening speeches and ribbon-cutting ceremonies are over the facility manager is left with the task of operating the facility on a daily basis.

The annual operations costs of a public safety training facility are unique. Planning for these costs should go beyond the traditional facility cost scenarios, such as electricity, water and janitorial services. Contemplate every aspect of the facility with a special eye toward the unique aspects of the facility, such as lead removal and disposal in the case of a law enforcement shooting range, the fuel cost of live fire burn simulators, or specialized training of staff for equipment operations. Remember that the cost to build the facility is only half of the financial challenge; the importance of the annual operations costs must not be minimized or overlooked.

TRAP NUMBER 6—Falling To Establish A Clear Benefit Analysis

In the initial stages of the planning process, consider these questions: How will the community benefit from the facility? What expectations do people have of the training facility? Why should budget managers choose to fund this training center project over others? Is there revenue potential for the facility? The purpose of the benefit analysis is to consider what makes the project stand out. Planners should never lose sight of the full project equation: The training needs of the facility, how much it will cost to build, what it will cost to operate, and most importantly, how funding will be obtained. Throughout the project planning process continually ask yourself, "What makes my project stand out?" or "Why should my project be selected over others?" Failure to clearly establish the project cost benefits may render the project "dead on arrival" when the funding analysis begins.

TRAP NUMBER 7—Failing To Establish A Clear Road Map For The Project

Any new business venture is enhanced by a straightforward, well-researched plan, and training centers are no exception. A business (or strategic plan) for the development of a training center is critical to fully assess the needs of the facility. No major questions should be left unanswered. This is particularly important when dealing with elected officials and grant providers. A business plan shows that those involved have thoroughly thought through the process and can provide well-researched, fact-based cost analyses that create confidence. Managers and elected officials do not like surprises, particularly when they pertain to costs. A straightforward approach is often the best way to convince them that a training facility meets community and agency needs. Don't get frustrated if the planning process takes longer than you expect. Be patient, and don't lose sight of the true purpose of your task—providing a safe, realistic, and consistent training environment that will serve department personnel, students, and citizens of the community.

You Can Avoid the Traps with an Effective Business Plan

ARE YOU. . .

Considering a new training facility?

Upgrading current training facilities?

Partnering with other agencies to plan a training facility?

Business plans developed by the Interact Business Group provide a professional business strategy for your training center project. In-depth customized research, financial statements, funding strategy, and high quality illustrations are included in each plan. Our plans provide answers to essential training center project questions and direction for the project

THE BUSINESS PLAN PROCESS

For nearly 22 years the Interact Business Group has written training facility business plans for public safety agencies and academia. During this time - and with a track record of many successful projects - we have developed the comprehensive Business Plan Process. Any project is enhanced by a straightforward, well-researched plan, and training centers are no exception. A business plan (also referred to as a strategic plan) for the development of a training center is imperative to fully assess training needs, cost of construction and operation, management objectives and funding options. The Business Plan Process consists of the following seven steps.



Learn more about the Business Plan Process, and other successful projects visit Interact Business Group on the web at: <http://www.interactbusinessgroup.com>

Follow us: [Facebook](#) | [Pinterest](#) | [LinkedIn](#) | [Responder Gateway](#)

About The Author:



Bill Booth, President of the Interact Business Group, has 23 years of experience consulting on issues of public safety training centers and strategic planning. His work on business and strategic planning and the development of the Public Safety Business Plan Process@ has been widely published in leading law enforcement and fire service publications.

In 2002, Bill developed the Training Needs Efficiency database analysis program designed specifically for public safety agencies to boost management oversight efficiency for training facilities.

Recent work includes consulting projects dealing with regional training facilities in Florida, Indiana, California, Michigan, Virginia, Oregon, Arizona, Pennsylvania, Washington, and Missouri. Bill has recently been selected as a Technical Resource Provider for the Department of Justice, National Institute of Corrections.

Bill Booth

President

INTERACT BUSINESS GROUP

760-651-2259

Also you can read Bill's monthly blog where he writes about Public Safety Training Center Planning, Operations and Funding. At: <http://theinteractgroup.com/blog/>