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Feasibility Studies: Much More Than A "Necessary Evil"

By *Cheri Vincent*

Feasibility studies are often thought of as a necessary evil during a project's pre-design phase—something a project must include, but that doesn't provide much value. In reality, well-executed feasibility studies are extremely useful tools; these plans are essential to the cycle of discovery and decision making.

They are critical in launching a project and setting a well-informed project scope, budget, and schedule. Consider, for example, that it is much more effective from both a planning and cost perspective to make changes with a pencil than a sledgehammer.



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The issue is that sometimes people don't know the right questions to ask—and simply don't ask enough. **To gain as much as possible from a feasibility study, you need to articulate what you're**

trying to learn and how you define success at the end of the process.

Do you know the 'hypotheses' that should be tested?

The project 'hypotheses' should seek to identify feasible options and understand how viable they are. Often the variables involved include the level of work and program of spaces. B&D's large K-12 programs typically provide this clarity through:

1. Categories of construction. Baltimore City Schools' 21st Century Schools Program, for example, has three categories: Strategic Renovation, Renovation/Addition, or Replacement. These categories help establish a baseline set of assumptions that help inform project budgeting exercises.
2. Program spaces and square footage. Most if not all programs include site-specific Educational Specifications based upon a district-wide guideline. This gives the

design team clear instructions on the quantity, size, and type of space they are testing during the feasibility study—a necessity since, without site-specific ed specs, architects can really be out to sea.

Who are the decision makers, what stakeholders should be involved, and how and when should they be involved?

It is important to clarify at the outset of a feasibility study the decision-making and engagement process for stakeholder and community input. For one, because the team needs to understand the level of effort involved and the impact to the schedule—but most importantly because the team needs to ensure expectations are managed about what type of input is needed and how it will be used.

Are you setting yourself up to succeed?

To get the most out of feasibility studies, focus on developing procurement strategies that bring the “A team” to the table to discover the necessary issues to solve. This may mean:

1. Issuing tightly scoped RFPs and vetting proposals carefully—Expect More, Get More!
2. Higher fees to gain access to a higher level of expertise and experience
3. Bundling projects together to make the fee more enticing to teams
4. Offering guarantees that teams will not be precluded from future work on the project
5. Enhancing some scopes of work, as appropriate, with additional exercises based on site-specific needs (e.g., archaeological, environmental phase 1, etc.). This ensures cost efficiency

To further discuss strategic feasibility studies, reach out directly to [Cheri](#).

Designing, Building, And Opening A Facility: The Communications Piece

A case study about the Baltimore 21st Century Schools Program

By *Karen Summerville* and *Kelly Connelly*

B&D is serving as co-program manager for the city of [Baltimore's 21st Century Schools](#) Buildings Program. As part of the arrangement, B&D is providing two dedicated team members focused on communications and public relations for all aspects of the design and construction phases of each project.



With the vast amount of traditional efforts involved—such as collecting input on the design, reporting construction progress, and organizing a ribbon cutting celebration—it can be easy to forget what a crucial role communications play in other aspects of managing a program. This case study zooms into just one aspect of a larger communications program to show the depth of effort that can be required to ensure a successful project. **That aspect: communicating about transportation to a new swing location.**

As part of Baltimore’s modernization program, five more school buildings recently went into construction. This relocated 1,800 students to swing locations for 18 to 24 months—a big shift for these students and their families who normally walked a short distance to their neighborhood school. In the past, the communication and outreach strategies regarding yellow bus service were outlined by the Director of Community & Public

Relations and swiftly executed by the 21st Century School Buildings Program Community & Public Relations team: B&D's communications and public relations specialists, transition support staff, and interns. However, this year, the team faced major challenges in receiving confirmation of available transportation services due to a district-wide bus shortage. This challenge caused major delays in communicating to families—some notices were only able to go out days before the start of school.

The Communications & Public Relations team went into action quickly to structure supports needed for students and their families. B&D's communications and public relations specialists worked with the department's director, transition support staff, interns, and other district staff on big-picture and logistics planning to ensure that all stakeholders were as informed and prepared as possible.

Big-picture planning required assisting in determining key messages around concepts like why a swing school is needed, why transportation is needed, what areas/students will be impacted and for how long, and all the "what ifs" (e.g., What if my child misses the bus? What if my child is sick?). With so much to convey and so many people needing to receive the right message at the right time, communications had to happen in layers—in meetings, via robo calls, and mailed letters, etc.

Logistics planning involved countless details, for example:

- Recruiting, securing, and training more than 130 volunteers to work at bus stops, including bilingual volunteers
- Developing and managing an online volunteer recruitment sign-up portal
- Creating and distributing informational packets and/or binders for bus stop volunteers, drivers, and aides
- Branding materials so all communications would be recognizable
- Creating large bus stop signs for the monitors
- Mitigating the impact to any in-school breakfast programs
- Assisting in the planning and execution of a bus stop volunteer appreciation event

Such a breadth and depth of planning within a narrow window of time requires a lot of strategic thought—working through each piece of the puzzle. Flexibility is also key, given the many moving pieces and how they can change from day to day, with rippling effects.

If your program needs strategic planning and communications support, reach out to B&D's K–12 planning and program management experts by emailing [Will Mangrum](#).

What Has B&D Been Up To Recently?

Fall means school openings, so we've been celebrating. Across the country, we've been excited to support the opening of dozens of schools—some new construction, some renovated, all deeply impactful. Here's a quick peek at some schools that opened in Washington, DC, this year:



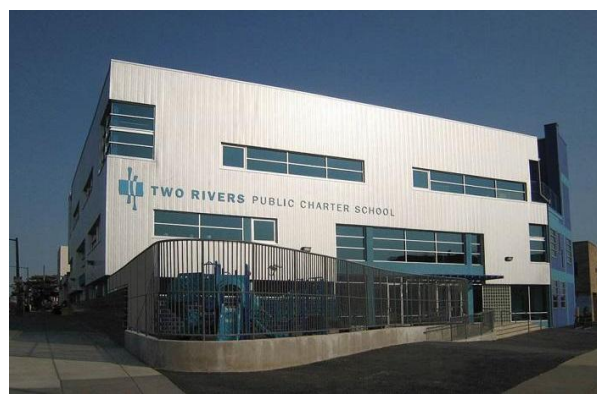
Murch Elementary School



KIPP DC Smilow Campus



DC Bilingual Public Charter School



Two Rivers Public Charter School

We were also excited to learn that **ENR's list of 2018 Top 50 Program Management Firms** has B&D moving up several places (now at 28th place, up from 34th). We have been honored to advise on more and more K–12 projects across the country, and this advancement reflects our growing body of work.

You can learn about one such project at LearningScapes 2018—A4LE's International Conference in Chicago. **Beth Penfield, ALEP, LEEP AP, and Ty Taylor, ALEP, will co-present "#AISDFuture - Building it Together"** on November 3rd at 10:15am.

Finally, we've been enjoying some great industry reading, including an article written by our own **Ty Taylor** in *School Business Affairs* talking about the “tiny” details that, when overlooked, can derail a construction project. Read his article, “The Dangers of Overlooking ‘Tiny’ Details,” [here](#). Congrats, as well, to our own **Cameron Chavira** for his article in *Governing* magazine on “**Libraries, Technology and the Route to Relevance.**”



B&D has three quarterly newsletters (Higher Education, K-12, and Venues). [Learn more.](#)

For more information, contact Douglas Kotlove, Vice President for Business Development & Marketing, at (202) 266-3410 or dkotlove@programmanagers.com

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