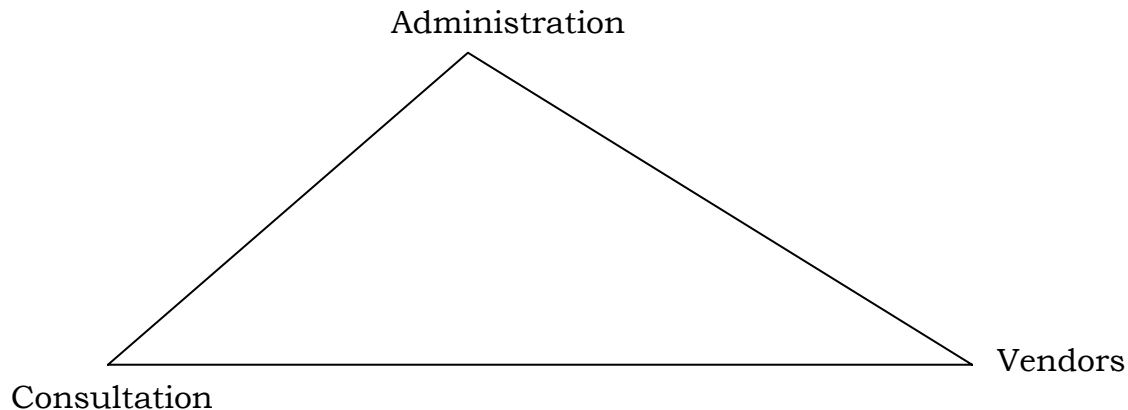


THE DEVELOPMENT TRIANGLE

James A. Horn
Morehead Planetarium
University of North Carolina
Chapel Hill, North Carolina

Over the past few years I have been involved in providing information for new planetariums under development, and I have been amazed at how much misinformation seems to be out there. There are, of course, the obvious misconceptions which can be easily corrected – the man who wanted to install the Spitz A3P star projector in his car, the man who wanted to know how much the Cinema 360 laser system cost, and the lady who was inquiring which planetarium projector showed the IMAX movies. Of greater concern is that some misconceptions are carried forward into the actual developmental stages of a planetarium. These are the misconceptions that can create something I call “The Development Triangle.” What is the development triangle? It is a breakdown in the communications between the administrators of a proposed facility, its consultants, and the vendors of the equipment that will ultimately complete the planetarium.



Some museum director, college president, or city official decides that he or she is going to build a planetarium. He gets an opinion from somewhere about how to proceed, and it's full speed ahead. He develops a prejudice from early on about what the planetarium is to be, how much it will cost, what it will look like, how it will be staffed (if at all) and, well, you can envision the rest. The basic difficulties seem to be the lack of knowledge of what a planetarium is, what the technological operations for planetariums are, what realistic funding levels for construction and operations are, and, probably most importantly, what its staff size, and the staff's relationship to the production efforts, should be.

So, you may say, tell us something we don't know. There are problems, but what do we do about them? I'll suggest there may well be something we can do about it – something that will create an improvement in what we see being developed as the facilities of the future.

One suggestion is create a document sanctioned by the International Planetarium Society – a process document, a “how-to” in planetarium development [see Editor's Note below]. A committee would be given the task of deciding what this document should contain. Then if a prospective facility were proposed, at least some guidelines could be provided. What should the document contain? One way to decide what information to put into such a document would be to survey the planetariums that have been developed in the last two years to see what kinds of problems are related to the development question. Several difficulties are clear, however, and these seem to indicate these definite guidelines on what such a document should contain:

A. Instructions on developing a statement of purpose for the new facility. What is this new facility to be, what is it to accomplish for its parent organization, at what cost, and how is it to be staffed to get this accomplished?

B. Instructions on the selection of a consultant or consultants for the facility, someone who will represent the interests of the organization, not the interests of the consultant or a particular vendor, or at least will not under any circumstances consult on items they do represent. The consultant should study the statement of purpose and discuss budget and staff size, while creating a schedule of visitations that will clearly support the purpose and will most educate the proposer as to options and equipment. Any person, consultants included, brings to a project a personal prejudice, but he must divorce himself from this. The primary responsibility of a consultant is to provide a series of educational opportunities for the clients, allowing them to make their own choices while making sure that critical mistakes are not made. The consultant should provide specific output in the form of reports that indicate the progress and the conclusions that are being reached.

C. A director must be hired at the early stages of development. If a planetarium is to have a particular configuration, why shouldn't it at least have the configuration that most nearly reflects the personnel that will use it? Staff considerations are some of the most difficult considerations, and the director should be available to make those decisions.

D. The architect must be chosen and a design plan started which incorporates secondary consultation, if necessary, that will bring expertise to the specific design that has been chosen. There are some excellent resource people in our industry for a diverse series of planetarium designs.

E. The primary system vendors should be chosen prior to a commitment to a design plan. The largest justified complaint I hear from vendors is that no clear plan is defined to incorporate systems into the actual architectural design of the facility. This is not entirely true when it comes to the instrument, but is largely true when talking about automation systems, audio equipment, special effects projectors, video, film systems, laser equipment and the like. The selection process for these major systems should be undertaken by the director of the facility with consultation advice at an early stage in the building planning.

F. The document could contain a list of resources in alphabetical order [IPS has in fact released a Resource Directory that does just that]. The resources should include instrument companies, dome companies, other categories of vendors, consultants, architects, and other resource specialists. It may be difficult to create this list without showing prejudice, and it may be difficult to keep an updated, accurate file. However, such a list would serve as an invaluable tool to developing planetariums.

It may be equally important to ask what this document should not contain. It should not, if possible, contain information that would stifle creativity in the creation of new facilities in architecture, technology, or staffing. It should, on the contrary, promote the kind of diversity and excellence which has always been a hallmark of our facilities and our profession.

The best source of information for a developing planetarium should and could be the International Planetarium Society. They are a group that collectively represents the ultimate resource in planetarium information. If they can create a document which will set aside individual and geographic prejudice, then we can help to create facilities that the future will be proud to accept. Will this then bridge the gap and create a sense of cooperation between administration, consultants, and vendors? Can it turn the potential Bermuda Triangle into a cooperation triangle? I honestly don't know, but I challenge us to give it a try.

Editor's Note: Many issues of this article have been addressed effectively by the Planetarium Development Group of IPS with a booklet called "*So You Want To Build a Planetarium?*" The Planetarium Development Group is chaired by Ken Wilson of the Ethyl Universe Space Theater. He can be contacted at the Science Museum of Virginia, 2500 West Broad Street, Richmond, VA 23220, phone 804-367-0211.

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