

Seven Pitfalls to Avoid When Building a Training Facility

About Us

With 90 years of Caswell International heritage and over 15,000 ranges fielded worldwide, InVeris Training Solutions brings the industry's best gun range design, development, installation and support experience to every job site. Meggitt has all the resources you need under one roof to guide you through the processes of range design, development and management.

It's easy for shooting range developers to feel overwhelmed with questions about courseware, ventilation, lead abatement, general environmental concerns, zoning regulations, proper range equipment -- the list seems endless. Rest assured that our team of experts, from engineering to sales, will streamline this process. We can help guide you through every step, from the research and bid process through range design, construction and maintenance, well after your range is completed.

With range planning expertise comes the most reliable shooting range products in the industry for judgmental training, use of force simulation, home invasion training, and many other virtual training needs, including:

- Portable simulators and trainers
- Target carriers, target retrieval systems
- Range control devices
- Steel and rubber bullet traps
- Shooting stalls
- Ballistic baffles and walls
- Mobile ranges
- Ventilation systems
- Shoot houses

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Introduction

Advanced training is rapidly becoming a prerequisite for law enforcement and public safety agencies across the world, and building a state-of-the-art training center means concentrated planning, organization, and knowing what pitfalls to avoid before making the first step.

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. To assist in this examination, InVeris Training Solutions presents **“Seven Pitfalls to Avoid When Building a Training Facility.”**

The Preliminary Site and Equipment Requirements are a Bit Fuzzy



Before a training facility project is considered, most law enforcement or public safety agencies already have an understanding of the land to be used. But what about the future use of the site? While it may be ideal today, 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 for less, as the site location may be the most important decision you make. Taking land just because it is available or even free—without doing your due diligence to ensure it is free of deficiencies—is key. Inclusion of the training to the site analysis is vital.

Another common mistake occurs in the selection of training equipment. Do not underestimate the rapidly changing world of gun range and simulation training equipment technology. Industry articles tout the latest interactive range training, role-playing simulations, and safe and environmentally friendly gun ranges. But where do you start when investigating training equipment? Read, reach out, and ask for help. Public safety training is a close-knit community, so contact others in the industry for their advice and guidance. They will frequently share information, techniques, and lessons learned, all for your benefit. If you're a member of a smaller department, call one of the larger departments whose budgets allow them to stay on the leading edge of technology and travel to various trade shows.

You'll also want to read a variety of industry magazines, blogs and web content to find out the latest issues facing like organizations. Here you'll find excellent exchanges of questions and answers. If you see a product of interest, call the manufacturer and ask for more information or even a hands-on demonstration. For example, InVeris Training Solutions has full demonstration capabilities of its virtual simulation and live fire products at its headquarters in Suwanee, Georgia. Or you can contact a sales representative for a demonstration at local gun ranges or training facilities (where available) to test out the equipment for yourself. If you're planning to attend a trade show, contact the manufacturer ahead of time and set up an appointment at the show. Meeting face-to-face and having your questions answered quickly and with a designated follow up is great when establishing vendor relationships

I'm Not Clear on How the Training Facility will be Used



Before you can move forward with your training facility, you need to fully understand and identify your department's training needs and develop a comprehensive training needs assessment. First, ask yourself these questions:

- What are the legal ramifications of training?
- What do you use as guides your training?
- Do you look to standards developed by the Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA), Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST), or others?
- What is your responsibility to meet these directives?

Do not plan for today and forget about tomorrow; think into the future. Factor projected staff increases, and take inventory of training currently being delivered, comparing it with future requirements. Use government websites to identify possible trends in new regulations that may currently be in effect. By creating an in-depth needs assessment up front, you'll ensure your facility is not outdated as soon as it is built.

In the law enforcement community, there is a growing trend toward multiple departments sharing one training facility. If that applies to your department, you'll also need to 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?

Upfront planning on the use of your facility will ensure streamlined operations and fewer headaches down the road.

Don't Fall Prey to the "Shiny Ball" Syndrome



Once you complete the needs assessment, you'll have a clear picture of what your training facility requires. 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 "turn dirt." Don't fall prey to salespeople who promise the "shiny ball"; a piece of equipment or deal that is so new and exciting that you are distracted from the end goal.

Ask yourself what facility asset is your highest priority (based on your needs assessment). If the needs assessment indicates the most important requirement is getting students in, trained, and out quickly, then focus on the number of shooting stalls and target retrieval systems that can handle high volume. Providing training assets that will enable your staff to perform their duties in the most effective and safest manner possible should always be your end goal.

Once your highest priority training asset(s) have been determined, you'll need to review budget provisions. When building a gun range you'll inevitably run up against circumstances beyond your control that will require budget concessions. For example, your number one facility need is tactical range equipment, but budget constraints won't allow the expenditure in the current phase of the funding. The second most needed facility asset is pre-programmable, computerized target retrieval systems. Pursue the target systems, but don't lose sight of your number one priority, the tactical range equipment. The shiny ball may be bright and sparkly, but if you don't need it, don't buy it.

Inadequate Forecasting Means Higher Costs



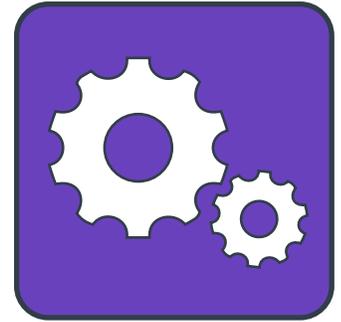
How much is the facility going to cost? While a simple and obvious question, many shooting range projects are delayed or even cancelled due to poor financial forecasting. Forecasting mistakes are made on both sides. Too high and you won't clear the first budget screening. Too low and your project may invite unwelcome skepticism and lose credibility.

Developing a realistic facility cost estimate encompasses several necessary components:

- 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 budget phasing means the facility takes several years to complete, you'll need to include compounded inflation factors into your estimate.
- If specialized equipment is included in your estimate, ask the suppliers for a rough order of magnitude (ROM) cost quote.
- Ask for the ROM quote in writing, which will add credibility to the estimate.
- Be sure to include any federal, state, or local taxes when developing the cost estimate.
- 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.

Site and infrastructure costs are often difficult to estimate, especially if a site has not been identified. If a site is identified, you'll need 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.

Failing to Establish Ongoing Annual Operational Cost



Whether you're launching a new training facility or improving an existing one, planners often fail to properly forecast the annual operations costs. Many times the cost to build the facility overshadows the planning process. While significant time is spent on construction cost, site work, equipment and furnishings, the annual facility operations cost is often an afterthought and given little attention. Once the grand opening ceremonies have commenced and the dignitaries have gone home, the facility manager is left with the task of operating the facility on a daily basis.

Public safety training facility annual operations costs are distinctive. You'll need to go beyond the traditional facility expenses, such as electricity, water and janitorial services. Envisage every aspect of the facility and pay close attention to unique services that will be required, such as lead removal and disposal. 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.

I Didn't Establish a Clear Benefit Analysis



When you're in the initial stages of planning, ask yourself these questions:

- How will the community benefit from the facility?
- What are the expectations of this training facility?
- Why should budget managers choose to fund this training center project over others?
- Does the facility have revenue potential?

The benefit analysis considers what makes the project prominent in a sea of other like projects. Planners should never lose sight of the full project equation:

- The training needs of the facility;
- Build cost;
- Operations cost;
- How funding will be obtained.

Throughout the project planning process, you'll continually need to ask what makes this project noticeable. If you don't establish the project cost benefits, you may find the project obsolete when the funding analysis begins.

My Business Plan Wasn't Fully Vetted



When working on a new training center, your future operations will be greatly improved if you begin with a straightforward, well-researched plan. The development of your training center initially falls upon your strategic plan ("business plan") to fully assess the needs of the facility. Answer all questions, no matter how small they may seem. This proves essential when dealing with elected officials and grant providers. The purpose of your business plan is to clearly define the purpose of the facility, your plan for development and operations, and show that your well-researched, fact-based cost analysis makes good business sense. No one likes surprises, especially when it comes to costs and expenses.

Be transparent, forthright and direct to convince your managers or elected officials that your facility will meet community and/or agency needs. The planning process may be long and arduous, but don't give up. Patience truly is a virtue, and you need to keep your eyes on the task at hand: providing a safe, consistent training environment to serve department personnel, students, and citizens of the community.

Conclusion

Building a training facility requires a lot of planning, organization, due diligence and hard work. Ensure you have all your t's crossed and i's dotted before moving forward. Consult with the experts before beginning such a large project and make sure any vendors you partner with during the process are properly vetted; see portfolios of work, check out websites and obtain references. A little effort on the front end will negate large headaches on the back end.

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