

The International Planetarium Society

Planetarium Development Guide

Introduction

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For decades planetariums all over the world have educated, inspired and entertained people. Often planetarium visitors from distant cities or countries are so inspired by a planetarium experience that they lobby for such a facility to be built in their own communities. Thus planetaria have proliferated not unlike public libraries.

The process of developing of a planetarium is most effective when closely tied to a presentation philosophy—the activities that will take place in the planetarium should dictate its design. For example, the developers of a new planetarium may envision programs that serve mainly local schools and help support national science standards, or it may serve mainly tourists and visitors to a locale. Type of programs envisioned may be dazzling high tech extravaganzas, live presentations, audience participation, seamlessly automated, or low-tech low-budget manually controlled programs. These are not all mutually exclusive visions. The developers' vision however is almost always tempered by compromises, financial restraints, educational objectives, vendor opinions, and political maneuvering.

Truth be known, planetariums today come in a great variety of forms. Deciding which one is best for a particular situation and determining what its requirements are can be a daunting task for those inexperienced with planetaria. Regrettably there are few guides to help local leaders of new planetarium startups with the myriad of details and decisions that planetarium creation entails. Vendors and consultants can provide useful advice but often this information is limited by individual bias. A broader experience base exists among those who work day in and day out in planetariums - professional planetarians. All too often the staff of a new planetarium is not hired until late in the project and only consulted at the last minute, or not at all, about the new facility. This often leads to planetariums that lack key elements, money wasted on needless features, and designs not suited for the mission of the parent institution—there are many potential pitfalls. Mistakes and waste in new planetaria have been the source of endless informal discussions at professional planetarium conferences for years.

In an attempt to help remedy this situation, the International Planetarium Society (IPS) produced a booklet, “So You Want to Build a Planetarium”. This booklet is available, on-line, at the IPS website: <http://www.ips-planetarium.org> Although this booklet covers most of the topics involved in building a new planetarium, it is, essentially, a survey of the subject. More in-depth information

was needed for the actual project manager for a new planetarium development. Hence the idea for this publication, the Planetarium Development Guide (PDG).

This book is an attempt to distill the wisdom of many years of experience in development of and day-to-day operations of planetaria by the people who work with them. Each chapter was written by an IPS member and peer reviewed by planetarium professionals to make them as objective as possible.

We envision this guidebook to be a living document. We plan to update its contents as often as needed and volunteer resources allow. I encourage you to submit your comments, suggestions, and criticisms to me, Ken Wilson, via e-mail (kwilson@smv.org) so that they may inform future revisions.

Finally, I want to express my heartfelt thanks to the IPS members, officers, and council members who've supported this project over the years and especially the many authors and reviewers who've volunteered their time and talents to make this guide a reality. At the great risk of inadvertently leaving some individuals out the following have been important contributors to this project:

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