SPORTS AND FITNESS

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Plunge Pools on Campus: Planning for Performance, Flexibility and Long-Term Value

BY NATARE CORPORATION

As private colleges and universities continue to look for innovative ways to enhance student wellness, recreation and athletic performance, plunge pools are becoming an increasingly attractive addition to campus aquatic facilities. But choosing a plunge pool is about much more than selecting a size or model.

For facilities professionals, the decision involves understanding how the pool will be used, determining the right location and infrastructure, planning for accessibility and safety, and considering long-term operating and maintenance costs. For campuses considering one plunge pool—or multiple installations across different facilities—careful planning early in the process can make the difference between a successful project and one that presents unnecessary challenges later. Natare Pools offers the following guidance for institutions considering plunge pools for their campuses.

Start With How the Pool Will Be Used

Q: How will you help us determine the right size, depth and number of plunge pools for our campus?

A: It really starts with understanding how you plan to use the plunge pools and who will be using them. Some are designed for individual use, while others are larger and can accommodate multiple people at once.

There's a lot of flexibility when it comes to size, shape and depth, so we'll talk through your goals, available space and expected use. From there, we can help determine what makes the most sense for your campus and your programs.

Understanding the Total Cost

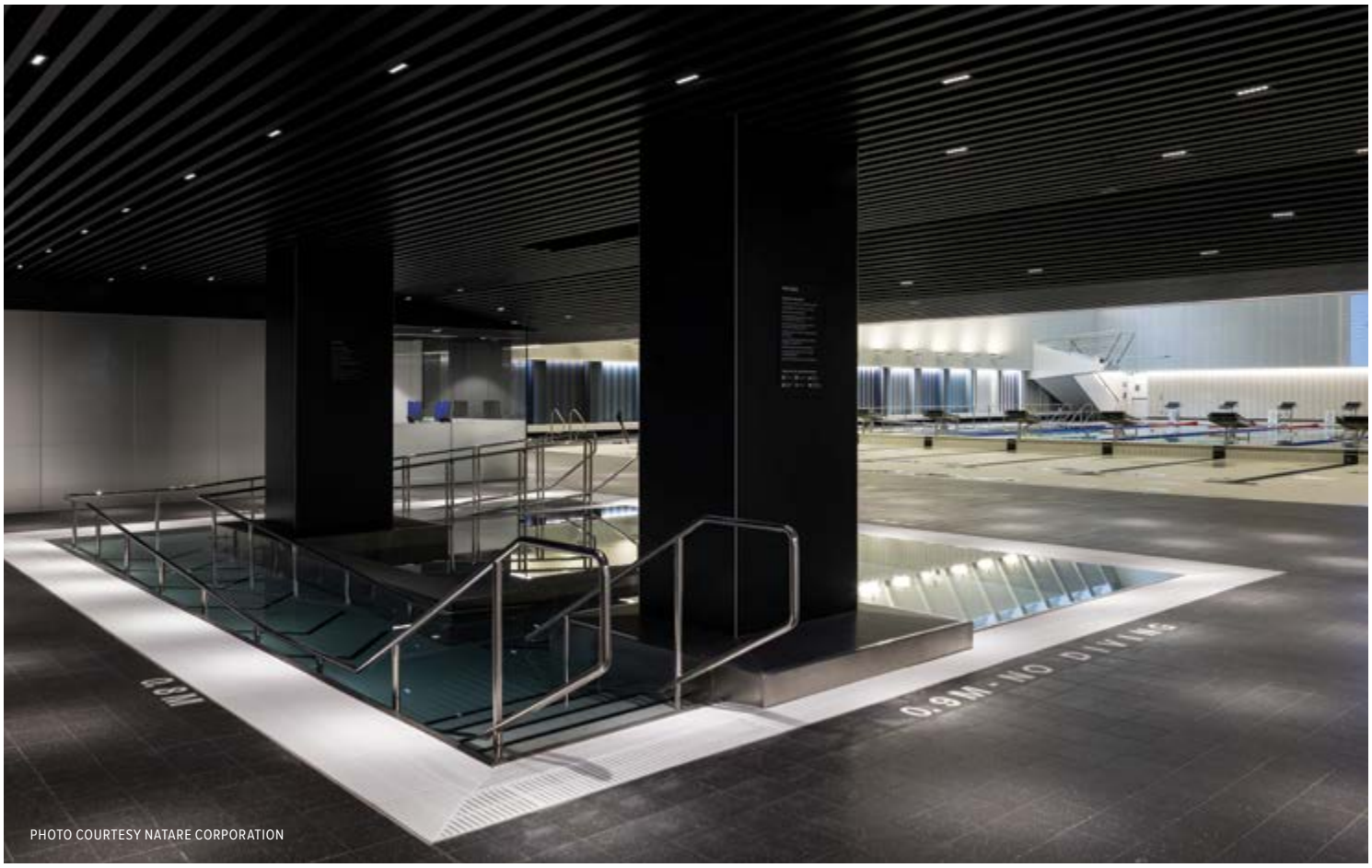
Q: What are the total installation and long-term operating costs?

A: There isn't really a one-size-fits-all answer because cost can vary quite a bit depending on the size of the plunge pool, the complexity of the installation and the site itself.

Access is a big consideration. We can deliver a stainless steel plunge pool as a single piece, in multiple sections, or as a knock-down system that is welded together on site. How we approach it depends largely on how we can get the pool into the building and where it needs to go.

We'll also look at whether the plunge pool is a standalone project or part of a larger new build or renovation. All of those factors, along with the local market, can affect the initial cost.

Long-term operating costs are largely driven by the amount of water and the equipment used to heat, filter and circulate it. Local utility rates matter as well, since the cost of water and electricity can vary significantly from one location to another.



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Plan Infrastructure Early

Q: What infrastructure does each pool require?

A: The first thing we need to understand is what will support the plunge pool. Typically, we're working with either a concrete slab or structural steel beams, and we can design around either one.

Our stainless-steel plunge pools are self-supporting, so the pool walls themselves don't require additional structural support. We can also customize the pool to work with the building structure.

The important thing is getting those details early in the design process so we can account for any unique conditions from the start.

For campus facilities departments, that early coordination can be particularly important when a plunge pool is being incorporated into an existing building. Access, structural conditions and the location of mechanical equipment should all be considered during the planning process rather than after the project is underway.

Safety and Accessibility Are Part of the Design

Q: What safety features and accessibility options are built into the system?

A: Accessibility is something we can account for during the design process. Depending on the facility and how the pool will be used, that could include an accessible ramp, lift, transfer wall or another solution.

There isn't one approach that works for every project, so we look at the client's preferences, how people will be using the pool and, of course, applicable local codes. From there, we can help incorporate the appropriate features into the overall design.

That flexibility is important for higher education facilities because plunge pools may serve different populations depending

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on their location. A pool associated with an athletic training facility, for example, may have different usage patterns than one located within a student recreation or wellness facility.

Maintenance and Operations

Q: How much maintenance will each plunge pool require, and who will perform it?

A: Routine maintenance will depend largely on the operating equipment and interior finish that are selected. Like any commercial pool, the water will need to be properly circulated, filtered and maintained.

Local health codes will also determine requirements for things like water chemistry testing and monitoring. Depending on how the campus operates its aquatic facilities, that work may be handled by facility staff or contracted to a local pool service company.

One of the advantages of stainless steel is that it provides a durable, low-maintenance pool structure, so the focus of ongoing maintenance is primarily on the water, equipment and interior surfaces.

For universities, understanding these responsibilities before installation can help facilities managers establish realistic staffing, maintenance and operating expectations. The pool itself is only one component of the system; filtration, circulation, water chemistry and other equipment all contribute to the ongoing workload.

Efficiency Starts With the Right Design

Q: How energy and water efficient is the system?

A: A lot of that comes down to the size of the plunge pool and the equipment selected. Simply put, the more water you have, the more energy it takes to heat, filter and circulate it.

The good news is that today's equipment gives owners more opportunities to operate efficiently. We can look at the intended use of the pool and help identify equipment that delivers the performance the facility needs without unnecessarily using energy, chemicals or water.

For institutions focused on sustainability and operating efficiency, this makes equipment selection an important part of the initial planning conversation. The objective is not simply to build a pool that meets today's needs, but to develop a system that can be operated efficiently over its useful life.

Ask for Relevant References

Q: Can you provide references from other colleges or institutions with similar installations?

A: We've worked with colleges, universities and other facilities on a wide range of stainless-steel pool and spa projects along with PVC membranes, bulkheads, stainless steel gutters, filtration systems and more. We can provide relevant examples based on what you're considering for your campus.

Every project is a little different, so we try to connect clients with examples that are useful—whether that means a similar application, installation condition, pool size, equipment or overall project scope.

For facilities professionals evaluating a new plunge pool, references can provide valuable insight into how a system performs in a real-world campus environment. Institutions should consider looking beyond the finished installation and asking about the planning process, installation conditions, maintenance requirements and overall experience with the system.

Thinking Beyond One Pool

Q: If we eventually want to install additional plunge pools at other locations on campus, how easily can your system be replicated?

A: Very easily, and there can actually be some advantages to doing that. Once we have a design that works for your campus, we don't necessarily have to start from scratch when it's time to add another location.

If the same or a similar plunge pool can be used elsewhere on campus, we can build from that original design and make adjustments where needed. There can also be cost efficiencies when we're able to fabricate multiple identical or similar units at the same time.

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For a university looking at a phased approach or multiple locations across campus, that repeatability can make future projects much simpler.

A Strategic Approach to Campus Aquatics

For private colleges and universities, the appeal of plunge pools can extend well beyond the pool itself. Whether the goal is to support student wellness, athletic recovery, recreation or another campus program, the best results begin with a comprehensive planning process.

Determining how the pool will be used, where it will be installed and what infrastructure is available provides the foundation. From there, institutions can evaluate accessibility, safety, equipment, maintenance, energy and water consumption, as well as the potential for future expansion.

For campuses considering multiple locations, establishing a successful design the first time can provide an important advantage. A repeatable approach can simplify future installations while potentially creating efficiencies in design and fabrication.

The key takeaway for facilities professionals is straightforward: plan the plunge pool as part of the campus infrastructure—not as an isolated piece of equipment. Early collaboration among facilities teams, architects, aquatic professionals and the pool manufacturer can help ensure that the final installation meets the needs of today's users while giving the institution flexibility for tomorrow's campus.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Natare Corporation is a global leader in stainless steel swimming pools and aquatic systems. Based in Indianapolis, the 100% employee-owned company designs, manufactures, and supports innovative pool solutions for competition venues, universities, resorts, waterparks, and aquatic facilities worldwide.