

# Chapter 5: Planning

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## In this chapter you will learn:

- ✓ Reasons for planning
- ✓ The planning team
- ✓ The planning process
- ✓ Plan follow-up

## Why Plan

One of the most important, and often overlooked, responsibilities of a library board is strategic planning. Having a plan is like having good insurance – always there to fall back on. It's also a road map to tell you where the library is going. Size doesn't matter. Every library needs a plan, no matter how small or how large the library and community may be.

Planning for libraries is a process of envisioning the future of both the community and the library and setting a direction to move the library toward a chosen future vision. Planning helps the staff and board understand the situation of their community, set priorities, and establish methods for achieving those priorities. The planning document provides a record of the decisions made during that process. The document also becomes a guide for decision making and action by staff and the board.

The library board or director that does not plan is like a shopper going to the store without a shopping list. The library may well be offering dozens of services that are not really needed by the community, while failing to offer the one or two services that might provide a great benefit.

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### Planning essentials—getting started

However, the *process* followed to create a plan will depend on the size of library and community involved with the project. Large and even many medium sized libraries, or those libraries accustomed to planning, may have the resources and experience to undertake a full-blown process such as that described in *Strategic Planning for Results*—(Nelson, Sanda, ALA, 2008) *Strategic Planning for Results* provides a blueprint for creating a vision of the future for a library and its community, along with a blueprint for creating the services that will enable a library achieve its vision. *Planning for Results*, because it is so thorough, describes a fairly time-intensive process involving a large cast of players. Any library, including smaller libraries or those new to planning, will benefit from undertaking the process outlined in *Planning for Results* if its board and staff have the commitment, time, and resources to follow through.

Start with a mission statement. Review your current one, or craft a new one. A mission statement sets the library's purpose. Describe the functions the library performs, for whom, and why the library is valuable to the community. Keep it short. One sentence is best.

Find sample mission statements at: <http://www.ctstatelibrary.org/dld/pages/sample-policies-connectic#Mission>

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## Who Plans?

The strategic plan for the library benefits from input from multiple individuals.

The minimum number needed to draft a strategic plan is one. On the other hand, large committees can be a real problem. Ideally, use a group between 7 and 9. Include 2 or 3 trustees, the library director, 2 or 3 staff, a government representative and 1 to 2 good library customers.

The library director can be relied on to gather statistics about a community. Important statistics include:

- size of community broken down by age, gender, racial heritage, etc.
- The existence of large or growing groups of newcomers to the community, whether they are urban or rural transplants, new ethnic groups, or other.
- Economic factors regarding the community, such as household incomes and source of payrolls.
- Educational profile of the community.

At the same time, the director and staff can gather facts about the library. Questions to ask include:

- What services are currently being offered?
- How have usage patterns been changing in the past few years?
- What is the composition of the collection? How many books does the library own? How many books on tape? Videos? Children's books, etc.?
- What is the age of the collection? What is the average publication date for each section of the nonfiction collection?

By discussing these and similar facts about the library and the community, the staff and board can come to some basic conclusions about the library on which to plan future services. A library with a small large-print collection in a community with a stable, aging population may want to buy more large-print books, for example. A science collection with relatively few titles less than one or two years old probably needs updating.

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By talking to other stakeholders, library planners can add to the strength and reliability of their plan as well as obtain buy-in from the public. There is an endless list of individuals and groups that might be consulted as part of a basic planning process. Which ones you choose will depend on your particular situation.

Suggested players include:

- The mayor and city council (or equivalent)
- Municipal employees such as an economic development officer, senior center director, or recreation department director
- Representatives from the PTA, teachers, Board of Education
- Representatives of active service groups such as Elks, Rotary, or Lions
- Representatives of other social/service organizations such as those representing growing minority populations
- Representatives of the religious community
- Current library users
- Those not currently using the library

You get the picture. The more people you talk to about the community, the more information you will have to create your strategic plan.

### Gathering Information

Probably the most common mistake library planners make when consulting the community in preparation for a strategic plan is to ask people about the library. Neophyte planners ask what library services people are looking for. The real purpose of consulting all of these community representatives is to find out about them—what they are doing and what is important in their lives and work. The library staff and board are the experts in the broad array of possible library services. It is up to the experts to be creative in proposing new services or changes in services to meet emerging needs. The mayor and city council may be interested in developing tourism in a community, but they may never think

of the library as a vehicle for collecting and disseminating local information of interest to tourists. If you ask someone what the library should be like, they will answer based on their preconceptions about what a library is. Instead, inquire about community needs and then apply library resources to fashion the services to help the community fill those needs. There are a variety of ways to ask this large array of players about community needs. One of the simplest but most effective is simply to invite them to the library or a neutral site and talk to them. Find someone who is experienced in conducting focus group interviews. Construct one or more groups built around particular interests or an important segment of your community, such as the needs of children in the community or the needs of immigrants. Assist the interviewer in eliciting the opinions of interested parties regarding what is important to them.

Library planners often gather information by means of surveys. If you decide to use a survey, consider the following:

- What is the specific question you are trying to answer? What hypothesis are you testing?
- Don't ask questions simply for the sake of asking. If you ask whether the respondent went to college, for example, how will having the information affect your investigation?
- How will you use the information?
- Will your survey reach the target audience? Surveys done in the library are useless for learning the needs and opinions of nonusers. Current library users do not necessarily represent a cross section of the community.
- How will your survey be distributed?
- How will your survey be tabulated?
- Do a pretest. Make sure that your respondents have the same understanding of the questions you do.

Again, consider enlisting the help of someone experienced in writing and conducting surveys before you get started. This doesn't have to cost anything. You may find a volunteer at a local chamber of commerce or a nearby university, or a local resident may be willing to help who has conducted surveys as part of his or her business. If you write your own survey, at the very least have someone critique it for

you. A poorly executed survey can have less value than no survey at all. It may even lead you to opposite conclusions from those you might have reached otherwise.

### Outline of the Strategic Plan

Okay, you've gathered all your information. What do you do with it? A simple plan might be organized like this:

**Introduction:** Discuss the planning process: Who are you? What are your library and community like? How did you find this out? Who did you consult? How did you consult them? What did you find?

**Mission Statement:** What vision of the community are you are trying to support? What is the library's role in supporting that vision? What is the reason the library exists?

**Service Responses:** What are the specific services you will offer and, why?

**Activities:** Under each service, list the particular activities that will be carried out and what you intend to accomplish. How do these activities relate to the mission of the library?

**Evaluation:** How will you measure the impact these services are having on the target population? How do you know if you are doing it right? What are your alternatives if you are not?

The specific time frame your plan should cover will depend on how ambitious your plan is, or how many activities you hope to carry out. There is no magic formula that dictates that your plan should last five years, three years, or even one year. Do what makes sense for your library and your community. The most important thing you can do is to be adaptive.

### Plan Follow-up

Follow your plan and revisit it along the way. Make sure it is taking you where you want to go, and revise it as necessary. At the end of the planning cycle, when all evaluations are in, start over. Create a new plan and perhaps go a little farther in your information-gathering process.

Use the Strategic Plan every year to set goals for the Library Board.

### **Other Specialized Plans**

- Technology Plans
- Facilities Plans
- Disaster Plans
- Americans with Disabilities Act

In addition to general strategic planning for the entire library, you may also want to consider planning projects focusing on special issues such as technology or disaster preparedness.

Because new technologies can greatly expand the services and resources offered by a library, it is important that all libraries be involved in some type of technology planning.

Most libraries will rarely experience a severe emergency or natural disaster, but it is best to be prepared, just in case. Fires, floods, tornadoes, and hazardous material accidents can endanger lives, and it is important for libraries to have plans and/or policies in place for dealing with these types of emergencies. It is also important for staff to be trained to handle emergencies properly, including medical emergencies.

Plans and/or policies can also be established to prepare for recovery of library materials after an accident or disaster.

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**Sources of Additional Information**

Nelson, Sandra. *Strategic Planning for Results*. Chicago, IL: ALA, 2008.

*Disaster Preparedness Clearinghouse* web site

<http://www.ala.org/alcts/resources/preserv/disasterclear> developed by the Association for Library Collections & Technical Services, a division of the American Library Association

*Western New York Disaster Preparedness and Recovery Manual for Libraries and Archives*, Third edition 2003, Western New York Library Resources Council

<http://www.wnylrc.org/documentView.asp?docid=35>

Conservation OnLine (CoOL), *Disaster Preparedness and Response* (at

<http://palimpsest.stanford.edu/bytopic/disasters>)

Reed, Sally Gardner; Kalonick, Jillian *The Complete Library Trustee Handbook*. New York: Neal Schuman 2010