Chapter 19: Planning for the Library's Future

Library boards continuously guide, shape, and build library services for their community as they make decisions about money, buildings, programs, technology and staff. The challenge is to make these decisions based on a carefully considered written <u>plan</u>. As you've learned, planning is one of the five major roles of a library board. A good plan is a road map and assists the board and the director in making decisions that are the best ones for the community being served. It also publicizes the library's priorities and its vision of the future.

> Put simply, planning is deciding what is going to happen at the library over the next few years. It is taking charge of the library's future and creating it to be responsive to what the community needs.

Some important reasons to plan are to:

❑ Improve service to library customers
❑ Respond to changes in the community
❑ Reallocate resources to meet the greatest needs
❑ Anticipate opportunities and problems
❑ Provide direction for the library
❑ Make a difference in the community
❑ Enhance the image of the library within the community
❑ Be accountable

A library should undertake a formal planning process every three to five years to reevaluate the library's service to the community and its future. Planning involves looking at what is possible and considering a wide range of alternatives. Open-mindedness and creativity will help you develop a plan that will make the most effective use of library resources. Keep in mind the present and future needs of the entire community served by the library. Planning will be most effective when it involves a partnership between the board and director and includes obtaining input from the members of the public, as well as from staff.

Basic Questions to Be Answered in Planning

Planning involves the basic questions below:

❑ What are the needs in the community?
❑ What is the purpose of the library related to community needs?
❑ Where are we now?
❑ Where do we want to go?
❑ How will we get there?
❑ How will we know what we accomplished?

What are the needs in the community?

The first step in library planning is looking outward, not inward. What is your community like? What are the demographic, economic, technological, political, social and cultural factors that may have an impact on library services?   What is important to your community now and in the future? To answer these questions, gather information about the community and involve stakeholders such as the city, businesses, and cultural, educational, human service and social organizations. This step could include doing a SWOT analysis of the community, i.e., what are the community's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats?

What is the purpose of the library related to community needs?

The library mission is a brief statement of the library's purpose related to community needs. What role does the library want to play in the community? What should the library be doing? While somewhat general, the statement should state the library's major areas of emphasis. If you decide to use *Strategic Planning for Results* as a planning model (see description later in this chapter), the library's service responses would be included in the mission statement.

Where are we now?

What is the present state of the library? To answer this question, learn about the major services of the library and how they are being used. Gather information about the library budget, number of staff, the collection, library programs, number of public access computers, etc. How is the community using the library now? Are there areas where use is growing or declining? This step could include doing a SWOT analysis of the library, i.e., what are the library's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats? The library director will be an especially important source of information about the current state of the library.

Where do we want to go?

What does the library want to accomplish? Where should the library be in the future? In other words, what are the library's goals? Goals are general, non-measurable descriptions of conditions or accomplishments which will support the library mission. *Strategic Planning for Results* (described later in this chapter) suggests that goals have two parts: who will be served and how they will benefit. Sample goals are:

❑ "Children will discover the joy of reading."
❑ "Teens in Anytown will have materials and programs that excite their imaginations and provide pleasurable reading, viewing and listening experiences."
❑ "Business owners in Anytown will have the information they need to make their businesses thrive."

Objectives are specific, measurable, time-limited descriptions of desired results. They are used to measure progress toward reaching your goals. *Strategic Planning for Results* recommends that there are at least two written objectives for each goal. An example of an objective for the teen goal above might be:

"Each year 75% of teens who use the library will say that library materials and programs provide them with satisfying recreational experiences."

A planning resource is *In Service to Iowa: Public Library Measures of Quality* published by Iowa Library Services. This document, developed with input from the public library community, encourages the ongoing development of quality library service in Iowa. Used as a planning tool, it assists libraries in setting goals and writing objectives based on service standards. Every public library must determine its own identity in its community. *In Service to Iowa* encourages libraries to plan, offer services based on community needs and measure their effectiveness.

How will we get there?

Activities state the actions that will be taken to meet the objectives. For every objective, a number of possible activities should be identified and analyzed. The analysis should include the potential impact of each activity on the objective, the likelihood of success, and the cost and impact on other library activities. At least one activity should be identified for each objective. Activities will include a time frame for accomplishing them and who will do what.

The library director will be integrally involved throughout the planning process. When it is time to identify specific activities, the board's role typically diminishes and the library director's role will increase because of his or her knowledge of day-to-day library operations.

How will we know what we accomplished?

Progress is measured against the written objectives. Usually statistics will be gathered to measure progress and the library director will need to determine what data to regularly gather so that information can be provided to the board.

Once the plan is complete, the planning process shifts to implementation, review and evaluation. Plans should be reviewed and updated at least annually. Have objectives been accomplished? Are there parts of the plan that are out of date and in need of updating? Are there new elements that need to be added to the plan? Plans are dynamic documents and at times it is necessary to change them. While the mission statement and goals are not apt to change during a review process, objectives and activities could very well change.

Action Checklist:

❑   Has the board developed a plan for the library?
❑   Has the board used the community's and library director's input in the planning process?
❑   Has the plan been evaluated in the last year?
❑   Has the board adopted an annual budget which supports the plan?
❑   Is the library budget adequate to implement the plan?

Strategic Planning for Results

Since 1980 there have been five planning guides developed for public libraries with the most recent being *Strategic Planning for Results,* by Sandra Nelson for the Public Library Association (PLA) in 2008.

Like the other guides*, Strategic Planning for Results* was built on three basic assumptions:

❑ Excellence must be defined locally—it results when library services match community needs, interests, and priorities.

❑ Excellence is possible for both small and large libraries—it rests more on commitment than on unlimited resources.

❑ Excellence is a moving target—even when achieved, excellence must be continually maintained.

There are two significant changes in *Strategic Planning for Results*:

"Strategic planning," not "long-range planning" is used to describe the planning process. This change is an acknowledgment that libraries need to respond to the dynamic, changing environment.
The book includes a great deal of information about understanding and managing the change process.

The steps and tasks involved in using *Strategic Planning for Results* and brief descriptions of the service responses are included on the following pages.

Strategic Planning for Results Tasks and Steps

Task 1: Design the Planning Process
Step 1.1: Identify the reason for planning
Step 1.2: Define planning responsibilities
Step 1.3: Prepare a planning schedule and budget
Step 1.4: Develop a communication plan
Step 1.5: Design and present a staff orientation

Task 2: Start the Planning Process
Step 2.1: Obtain board approval
Step 2.2: Select community planning committee members
Step 2.3: Invite committee members
Step 2.4: Prepare and distribute community and library information packets

Task 3: Identify Community Needs
Step 3.1: Present an orientation for members of the planning committee
Step 3.2: Develop community vision statements
Step 3.3: Define current conditions in the community
Step 3.4: Decide what needs to be done to reach community vision

Task 4: Select Service Responses
Step 4.1: Present an overview of the library to committee members
Step 4.2: Select preliminary service responses
Step 4.3: Describe the effect of preliminary service responses on current library services
Step 4.4: Select final service responses

Task 5: Prepare for Change
Step 5.1: Assess the library's readiness for change
Step 5.2: Plan to create a positive environment for change
Step 5.3: Review and revise communication plans
Step 5.4: Train supervisors and managers

Task 6: Consider Library Values and Mission
Step 6.1: Define values
Step 6.2: Consider the library mission

Task 7: Write Goals and Objectives
Step 7.1: Write system goals
Step 7.2: Write system objectives
Step 7.3: Determine the priority of goals and measures of progress for each unit

Task 8: Identify Organizational Competencies
Step 8.1: Understand organizational competencies and initiatives
Step 8.2: Identify organization issues
Step 8.3: Write organizational competencies and initiatives

Task 9: Write the Strategic Plan and Obtain Approval
Step 9.1: Write and review the strategic plan
Step 9.2: submit the strategic plan for approval

Task 10: Communicate the Results of the Planning Process
Step 10.1: Define the target audiences
Step 10.2: Develop a communication plan
Step 10.3: Develop communications to target audiences

Library Service Responses

Be an Informed Citizen: Local, National and World Affairs. Residents will have the information they need to support and promote democracy, to fulfill their civic responsibilities at the local, state, and national levels, and to fully participate in community decision making.

Build Successful Enterprises: Business and Nonprofit Support. Business owners and nonprofit organization directors and their managers will have the resources they need to develop and maintain strong, viable organizations.

Celebrate Diversity: Cultural Awareness. Residents will have programs and services that promote appreciation and understand of their personal heritage and the heritage of others in the community.

Connect to the Online World: Public Internet Access. Residents will have high speed access to the digital world with no unnecessary restrictions or fees to ensure that everyone can take advantage of the every-growing resources and services available through the Internet.

Create Young Readers: Early Literacy. Children from birth to five will have programs and services designed to ensure that they will enter school ready to learn to read, write, and listen.

Discover Your Roots: Genealogy and Local History. Residents and visitors will have the resources they need to connect the past with the present through their family histories and to understand the history and traditions of the community.

Express Creativity: Create and Share Content. Residents will have the services and support they need to express themselves by creating original print, video, audio, or visual content in a real-world or online environment.

Get Facts Fast: Ready Reference. Residents will have someone to answer their questions on a wide array of topics of personal interest.

Know Your Community: Community Resources and Services. Residents will have a central source for information about the wide variety of programs, services, and activities provided by community agencies and organizations.

Learn to Read and Write: Adult, Teen, and Family Literacy. Adults and teens will have the support they need to improve their literacy skills in order to meet their personal goals and fulfill their responsibilities as parents, citizens, and workers.

Make Career Choices: Job and Career Development. Adults and teens will have the skills and resources they need to identify career opportunities that suit their individual strengths and interests.

Make Informed Decisions: Health, Wealth, and Other Life Choices. Residents will have the resources they need to identify and analyze risks, benefits, and alternatives before making decision that affect their lives.

Satisfy Curiosity: Lifelong Learning. Residents will have the resources they need to explore topics of personal interest and continue to learn throughout their lives.

Stimulate Imagination: Reading, Viewing, and Listening for Pleasure. Residents who want materials to enhance their leisure time will find what they want when and where they want them and will have the help they need to make choices from among the options.

Succeed in School: Homework Help. Students will have the resources they need to succeed in school.

Understand How to Find, Evaluate, and Use Information: Information Literacy. Residents will know when they need information to resolve an issue or answer a question and will have the skills to search for, locate, evaluate, and effectively use information to meet their needs.

Visit a Comfortable Place: Physical and Virtual Spaces. Residents will have safe and welcoming physical places to meet and interact with others or to sit quietly and ready and will have open and accessible virtual spaces that support networking.

Welcome to the United States: Services for New Immigrants. New immigrants and refugees will have information on citizenship, English Language Learning, employment, public schooling, health and safety, available social services, and any other topics that they need to participate successfully in American life.