

Planning, Implementation and Evaluation by Library Boards



Planning is a word that should cross the lips and be in the hearts and minds of public library boards of trustees often. Yet it is something that boards often defer until it becomes absolutely necessary to undertake. And yet **planning**, if done regularly, can simplify the work of a library board by providing a constant and consistent guide for its deliberations and decision making. In this Fact Sheet, we will take a look at the elements that go into effective **planning**, and how that planning leads logically to **implementation** and **evaluation** of board actions.

If you have ever been part of a group that has gone through a **planning** process, you will quickly recognize that all planning processes share many common elements. Sometimes these elements are put in slightly different order; at other times one process might start at an earlier step than another one. The elements listed below are taken from *The New Planning for Results: A Streamlined Approach*, by Sandra Nelson:

- **Vision:** What is the library board’s vision of the future of the community served by the library? Where is it going, and where could it go?
- **Community Needs:** What needs exist within the community. At this point the board might do a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis of the community. List the Strengths of the community; list the Weaknesses; and so on.
- **Service Responses:** Of the needs identified in the community, which of these can be addressed by the library? What service responses (or roles) will the board choose for the library to provide or fill (all the time being realistic and cognizant of the library’s resources)?
- **Mission:** Based on all the above, what mission will the board set out for the library within the community? (This may take some time; it is sometimes difficult to sort out all the information you have gathered and processed up to this point. But spending adequate time on the determination of the library’s mission at this stage will save much time and effort later in the board’s planning process.)
- **Service Goals:** Growing out of the Mission statement, what service goals will the board and library set for itself? Remember that these goals should be measurable, that is, so that it can be determined if the library has met each goal. These are called “outcome” goals. Another handy way to develop these goals is to ask: What real difference has this made to the lives of community members? To their

skills, knowledge or abilities? To their personal goals? (Remember the purpose here is not to come up with service goals that are easily reached so that they can be checked off some list, but to develop service goals that, when reached, will truly benefit the community and the target groups identified above.)

- **Objectives:** These objectives will help in the measurement of whether or not the library's service goals are attained. They should contain a measure, a standard against which to measure the library's attainment and a time frame by which to attain it.
- **Activities:** These are the specific programs, services, etc. developed with all of the above kept in mind. Each program, or service, etc. should be tied back to a specific objective, to a particular service goal(s), to the mission of the library, and so on.
- **Plans:** These are the written instructions related to each activity. If they are written, then they can be examined and changed if needed to reflect all of the above.

So how do these steps then relate to implementation and to evaluation?

Look back at the steps above. Can you see how the process builds one step on the other, and how both **implementation** and **evaluation** are necessary parts of this process? Each element of the planning process has questions built into it. For example:

- Are the service responses chosen by the board really going to address an identified need in the community?
- Are the service goals chosen by the board and library consistent with the mission of the library? (or does the mission need to be rethought?)
- And on and on

There is no implementation that is done without questioning how it relates to the whole. There is no evaluation that is done without there being an evaluation of the evaluation itself – It is really telling us what we need to know, or do we need to rethink this?

Useful Resources:

- "FOLUSA Fact Sheet #21: A Checklist for Board Strategic Planning," Friends of Libraries USA
- *The New Planning for Results: A Streamlined Approach*, by Sandra Nelson. American Library Association, 2001.
- *Strategic Planning for Results*, by Sandra Nelson for the Public Library Association. American Library Association, 2008.
- Taking Charge of Your Library's Future: Planning Resources <http://www.nlc.state.ne.us/libdev/planning/planningresources.html>
- Don't forget to contact your **local regional library system office** or the **Nebraska Library Commission** for additional information. Check this website

for regional library systems contact information:

<http://www.nlc.state.ne.us/system/> or contact Richard Miller, Library Development Director via email: richard.miller@nebraska.gov or Laura Johnson, Continuing Education Coordinator via email: laura.johnson@nebraska.gov or via phone: 1-800-307-2665; 402-471-2045 at the Commission.

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