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Spotlight on Construction: Planning, Communication Are Key in Building New Libraries

Kathryn S. Ames
Athens Regional Library System, kames@arlsmail.org

Greg Heid
Newton County Library System

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Spotlight On CONSTRUCTION

Planning, communication are key in building new libraries
by Kathryn S. Ames and Greg Heid

So you want a new library for your community, but wonder where do you begin? This article presents an outline for *beginning* the process based on planning principles that will lead to a well-documented and articulated plan for the future. The quest for a new library or an addition/renovation project begins well before the local referendum and state grant allocation process. Relying on a solid strategic planning model will assist the board and director in determining the best direction of the project as well as its eventual scope. Writing a building program is the final step in the process; developing a strategic plan is the beginning point.

Ames

Heid

Develop a Plan of Service
The first step a library system should take is the development of a comprehensive strategic plan of library service. By defining where the library currently is with its services to the community and where it wants to be in the future, the library system has taken the first steps toward the construction of a facility that works well for both the staff and the public.

One example of a successful planning model is the PLA *New Planning for Results* [Nelson, 2001], which has been used successfully by many libraries across the country. The key difference in the PLA approach from other planning models is the use of a community planning committee, the identification of community needs and values, and emphasis on the community's needs as being the primary focus for the library facility.

By involving community leaders and identifying community needs, the group assesses roles the library should adopt to address those needs. Other planning models are equally appropriate; however it is absolutely essential that the system develop a detailed plan of service before undertaking a building project. The "Plan" is the critical document that identifies the direction for the future and details how various services will be delivered to the public.

Community input may be gathered from focus groups, surveys, town hall meetings and direct interviews. It is important to learn what people expect and what they desire from the library. There are many examples of interview questions and surveys online; however, the key is to obtain information from library users which will give the best indication of the services and resources that are most needed by the public in the library's service community. This is also the appropriate point to start looking at community data. NPFR provides many data sheets as well to easily gather and synthesize this needed information from the public.

The key roles of the library must reflect community needs. NPFR identifies a variety of service responses, or roles, which include many of the traditional and opportunities for nontraditional services, resources and activities that a library will offer to the public. Using these roles and the descriptors, the board, director and committee, comprised of representatives of the target audience, should undertake a "vision quest."

In this process, the committee envisions the ideal future of the community or library service area, taking into account community needs as reflected in responses to surveys and other information-gathering techniques.

Once a vision is established, the group should take a realistic look at where the community is at the present time in reference to the vision.

The realistic look at the community's needs will include all aspects of the community, including library service and facilities. The board, library director and community committee next identify what it will take to move the community toward the ideal future vision and how library services can assist in realizing the vision — the needs of the community. Finally, this group will then select the three or four library service responses, or roles, that will best realize the future vision of the community. This becomes a plan for the library.

The "Plan" reflects the roles, goals and objectives and includes the types of services a library system hopes to deliver, the optimal size of the collection, technology considerations including a discussion of how equipment will be used, staffing requirements based on identified roles, and actual facility needs. This information and direction assists the board, director, staff and the community committe in further defining the development of the Needs Statement. According to Richard Hall, the Needs Statement should include the following points:

- ▶ Define library service area
- ▶ Analyze the community
- ▶ Analyze the community's need for library service
- ▶ Develop a plan of service
- ▶ Determine the adequacy of the current library
- ▶ Assess space needs
- ▶ Evaluate alternatives

The Needs Statement is the starting point for a building program. [Hall, 1994] Included in this document should be a Facilities Master Plan that shows where libraries are currently located, the square footage of each facility, the immediate service area of each library building, indications of planned growth areas, planned future locations of library facilities with square-foot determinations, and documentation of needs for both the existing and future library facilities.

Next Steps
After the completion of a formal plan of service and the Needs Statement, the Building Committee is ready to identify space needs. At this point in the process, the library system may hire a facilities consultant to write a building program or may undertake using Libris, a

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software program developed by the California State Library, to assist the library staff in writing the actual building program.

An experienced library consultant will be able to use the library's strategic plan's service priorities, roles, resources, needs and expectations to develop a building program that will produce a facility that will reflect the plan of the library system, meet the needs of the service area and embody the best (most up-to-date) practices of library construction.

Libris can be used by a library director or staff to develop a building program. Libris helps to identify possible areas and assigns generic spaces and possible furniture to the areas. It is the responsibility of the person using Libris to ensure that the final product is indeed representative of the actual needs of the library and reflective of the goals of the library. Each aspect of the library's service plan must be examined and special requirements identified in order to best meet the needs of the community and public within the library's service area.

Financing

Raymond Holt, building consultant, says, "More library facility projects come to grief on the shoals of financial difficulty than on any other hazard." Planning several years in advance of the actual project requires skill analyzing inflationary cycles and construction knowledge. Projecting costs accurately is often handled as a quick and dirty process when it should be undertaken with the help of construction experts and a comprehensive building program.

Project estimates may be based on figures from Means construction publications, state library consultants, Libris, the building program construction consultant and other sources within the construction community using projected square footage and the best calculations for construction. Use of professionals is essential if one hopes to have a realistic budget and credibility with funding agencies.

The most popular tools for raising local matching funds in Georgia include the Special Local Option Sales Tax, impact fees and other local referenda. The library board and director should communicate with the municipal funding agencies of the library system to ascertain which option the city, county or school system prefers to use to raise one-time capital funds for construction. Most likely, the municipal agency has a scheduled process already in place

> **"Organizations that have efficient, clear, reliable means of communication tend to be successful."**
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> — George Barna
> *The Power of Vision*

that the library board can become part of, to raise the necessary funds to construct a future library facility.

The library director should also talk to fellow heads of public agencies (who already have built facilities using funds from SPLOST, impact fees or local referenda) to learn how to enter into the process most used by the municipality to raise capital funds for construction.

In addition to local government, some libraries may choose to develop a capital fundraising campaign seeking donations, grants and direct gifts for the construction of a library facility. The Friends of the Library and the local library foundation or endowment may also be involved in such a fundraising effort. These grassroots efforts will usually involve a large number of people and build popular support for the library project.

And Don't Forget

"Organizations that have efficient, clear, reliable means of communication tend to be successful." [Barna, 2003] While much can be written about a marketing plan and sales techniques for rallying support for the project, the most important factor is keeping people informed. This may be accomplished by speaking to civic and community groups, newsletters, newspaper updates, case statements, information on the library's Web site and general library displays.

Keep the information flowing and informative! Do not forget to continually inform library staff members. All staff should all receive thorough training in the goals of the project, key points to discuss when the general public inquire about any future library facility, and print materials that have been developed about the future construction of the facility. Each of these steps is critical to a successful project. ⏭

Resources:

Barna, George. *The Power of Vision*. Ventura, CA: Regal Publishing, 2003.

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Holt, Raymond. *Wisconsin Library Building Project Handbook*. Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 1978.

McCabe, Gerard B. *Planning for a New Generation of Public Library Buildings*. Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 2000.

Nelson, Sandra. *New Planning for Results*. Chicago: American Library Association, 2001.

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