

Planning: Or, If I Knew Where We Were Going, I Wouldn't Be Lost!

Planning is an important part of the work of library directors and library boards. With limited resources, it is important that your library use what it has in a strategic, systematic manner. Unplanned changes usually cost more in time and money than changes that are thought out in advance.

Planning can help secure funds from outside sources. A well-constructed plan shows funders that the library knows what needs to be done for the community. It is also an indicator of a fiscally responsible agency.

In our dynamically changing environment, strategic planning helps a library be more responsive than the traditional long-range plan of the past. Writing a strategic plan is not enough, however. The strategic plan is a map of how the library will achieve the library's goals and objectives over a stated period of time. Once the plan is written, you and your board should refer back to it as you make decisions throughout the year.

To find out if your library has a strategic plan, look for a copy in your library's *Transition Notebook*. If you cannot find a strategic plan—or if your predecessor has not left you a *Transition Notebook*—ask your board chair/president if such a plan has been written. If it has been written, ask for a copy for the library's *Transition Notebook*.

In a well-written plan, you will find activities for each year. You can use these activities to help you make decisions about what your library will be doing. Sometimes activities cannot be carried out, in which case your board should decide whether to continue, modify, or drop the activity. This should be done on a regular basis, with an overall review of the plan at least once a year. One of the advantages of a strategic plan is that it can be modified as needed.

If your library has not yet written a strategic plan, you need to think about doing so. One planning process that is recommended for public libraries appears in a book entitled [*Strategic Planning for Results*](#), by Sandra Nelson for the Public Library Association (PLA), a division of the American Library Association (ALA). [Used copies](#) are available at Amazon.com. There are other planning models that can be used as well.

Planning is a large task for a new director to take on. If your board needs to write a strategic plan, contact your ICfL Area Field Consultant for help in getting started.