



# Planning:

## A Practicum for Busy Librarians

by Marnie Marie Warner

Developing a planning document easily falls to the bottom of "to do" lists. Yet, without a plan, the future of the library can be crafted by trends and other people. When you are trying to ignore the need for a plan, remember the conversation between Alice and the Cat:

"Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?"

"That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the Cat.

"I don't much care where—" said Alice.

"Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the Cat.

"—so long as I get somewhere," Alice added as an explanation.

"Oh, you're sure to do that," said the Cat, "if you only walk long enough."

Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventure in Wonderland*

If you don't care where you go and you don't care how long you walk, then leave the plan at the bottom of the to-do list. But if you do want to have a chance at defining the library's future, then move the plan to the top of the list and get started.

The Massachusetts Trial Court Law Libraries (TCLL) are engaged in their third planning process in twenty years. The first plan, created in 1983, "Guidelines for the Delivery of Library Services to the Trial Court," served as a blueprint for how the seventeen independent county law libraries would evolve into a system of law libraries and set guidelines for library services. The second plan was guided by the American Library Association's *A Planning Process for*

*Public Libraries and Planning and Role-Setting for Public Libraries: A Manual for Options and Procedures.*

The second planning process prompted us to develop a mission statement and determine service roles most applicable to public law libraries, from which we developed goals and objectives to achieve those service roles.

TCLL is now in another round of planning, guided by ALA's *Planning for Results* (1998). One of the key concepts of *Planning for Results* is to gather input on the needs of your community and/or library users and then develop a plan in response to the needs expressed. For court libraries in particular, the concept dovetails with the national Public Trust and Confidence Initiative to increase public trust and confidence by involving the public in specific justice improvement activities in their own communities.

So how do you go about getting your communities' input and then what do you do with it?

Trial Court Law Libraries are located throughout the state. The Planning Committee decided to hold eight "town meetings" from 4:30 to 6:00 p.m. in the library or courthouse. The time was chosen so people, especially court personnel and attorneys, could put in a workday or their billable hours before giving time to the law libraries. Invitations were sent to library users who represented various constituencies. The "rule of thumb" was that for every ten invitations, one person will actual participate. We sent 1,250 invitations and 99 people attended. The invitations provided a marketing opportunity and a new brochure was created emphasizing the TCLLs' move into the electronic age. On the back of the invitation, four questions were posed (for example, "How do you want to use the TCLLs in five years?"). People were encouraged to send responses, and some did. TCLLs' Web page also included an invitation to respond electronically to the same questions ([www.lawlib.state.ma.us](http://www.lawlib.state.ma.us)). Two weeks before the town meetings,

each TCLL put up open invitation signs, allowing us to say that everyone was welcome. Most attendees had received the written invitation.

Because the chief justice for administrative and management (CJAM) could not attend the meetings, an eight-minute videotape was created with an introduction by the chief justice as well as footage of all seventeen TCLLs. A script was developed for the CJAM. The video served two purposes: the CJAM's introduction gave legitimacy to the process, especially because she was genuinely convincing that input would make a difference in our planning, and second, people got to see the difference in physical space of all seventeen TCLLs.

Participants at the town meetings included judges, attorneys from various sized firms, sole practitioners, students, law clerks, librarians, and *pro se*. To move the discussion along, the facilitators (two staff members) handed out an outline of ten possible long-range visions for the TCLLs (for example: better designed libraries; 24/7 access to legal information; emphasis on circulation and delivery; and legal research education). This list prodded people to think long range and to think about possibilities. One concern about this type of input is that people often can not envision what is possible, if they have not seen it. The vision statements, as well as seeing the video of all TCLLs, helped participants move beyond personal experiences and views.

The different needs expressed by the separate constituencies were a noticeable dynamic at the meetings. Attorneys felt having the primary law in electronic format only was fine. The public still wanted printed materials. Some judges and attorneys thought the TCLLs were leaning towards serving the public too much. Yet others said that by serving the public, the TCLLs had a more solid foundation to request funding from the legislature. The town meetings provided rare opportunities for our various constituencies to actually talk to each other and begin to understand that the TCLL mission and staff have a variety of roles—sometimes at cross purposes.

People were very honest and provided useful information. After three town meetings, trends were already surfacing. The trends included extended hours beyond court hours (people want access until 6:30 p.m. or at least one night a week and Saturdays); access to more electronic databases, especially remote access; retention of books, particularly treatises; publicizing the TCLLs and their services to current users; maintaining the library as quiet space to work; and improved technology. To capture people's thoughts, one staff member took notes on a flip chart so participants knew that we were hearing what they said, and another person took notes in the room. All TCLL staff were invited to attend as observers, not participants. Sometimes it was difficult for staff to just listen as people made inaccurate statements. Like the focus groups the TCLLs had done a few years ago, the facilitator did not correct inaccurate statements during the discussion. At the end, if something was totally misunderstood, the facilitator made a few comments to provide accurate information. All staff engaged with participants before and after the discussion. These informal conversations frequently included useful information, which was provided to the recorder. It also let us capture the thoughts of people who do not feel comfortable talking in large groups.

Press releases were sent to the local newspaper. Three papers ran lengthy articles. Two articles were on the service of the Trial Court Law Libraries. One newspaper sent a reporter to the town meeting. His article the next day captured the essence of the meeting. Finally, one editorial, "Updating Libraries for the Information Age," was a gift to all libraries. The editorial's last paragraph read:

But we can't expect libraries to get better unless we're ready to help them financially. It's true that the services they provide are free. The libraries themselves are not. The sooner we recognize that, the longer we can expect a high level of service from these great institutions.

Notes from the town meetings were shared with staff. At a Head Law Librarians' meeting, the information was organized into six topics: extended hours, outreach/publicity, multiple formats and technology, service to diverse users/*pro se*, training and education, and library design/environment. All fifty-seven staff

members attended one of the six working groups, whose assignment was to begin to develop goals and objectives as a response to what the town meeting participants expressed.

A few staff are currently in the process of pulling together the work of the small groups. A draft plan should be completed in March.

The Trial Court Law Libraries received a "Reinventing Justice" grant to hold a strategic implementors meeting on May 31. Participation, by invitation, will include representatives from the town meetings and key staff in the court system, whose cooperation and approval will be needed to implement and achieve the goals and objectives of the plan. The draft plan will be mailed ahead of time. The agenda for the day is to present the draft plan, ask for questions and clarifications, and resolve any unanswered questions or issues. Just as the town meetings drew together the various library users, the strategic implementors hope to pull together the myriad of folks who are needed to support the future of the TCLLs.

The final step will be to send the plan to the CJAM for approval. Once approved, the plan becomes a blueprint for the next few years. It will also be filed with the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners as a requirement for receiving federal library grant funding. Updates will be sent periodically to town meeting participants to let them know what is happening. In the end, these are the people the TCLLs serve and the people about whom we speak in our mission statement:

As the public law libraries of the Commonwealth, the Trial Court Law Libraries provide legal information to the Trial Court, legal community, and general public. This library network strives to develop collections and services to address the legal reference, research, education, and community information needs of library patrons. The Trial Court Law Libraries are committed to facilitating access to their collections and services (adopted March 1988).

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## Shortcut to A Plan

If you are not ready to undertake a planning process, yet want to create a plan for your library's future, use the AALL Strategic Plan ([www.aallnet.org](http://www.aallnet.org)) as the guide. Read the strategic directions and outcomes, and frame them as questions. Use your responses to the questions as the catalyst for creating a plan, as shown in the examples below.

### Strategic Direction #1

How is this library responding to the evolution of virtual and physical law libraries in the next few years? (Outcome 1A)

Is the law library staff recognized by the employer as central to the institution and decision-making at the highest level? If yes, how do we maintain that position? If not, what steps need to be taken to become recognized as central to the institution? (Outcome 1B)

### Strategic Direction #2

Is the library staff seen as the trainer of choice for legal information research within the institution? If not, what steps need to be taken for staff to become trainers and be recognized as the legal information trainers? (Outcome 2D)

### Strategic Direction #3

How is the library or staff involved in shaping information policy that ensures fair and equitable access to national and state legal and government information? Look at the outcomes and pick one or two areas in which to become personally involved.

### Strategic Direction #4

What is the library's plan for preserving and/or accessing historic legal materials?