

PLANNING FOR RURAL LIBRARY SERVICE

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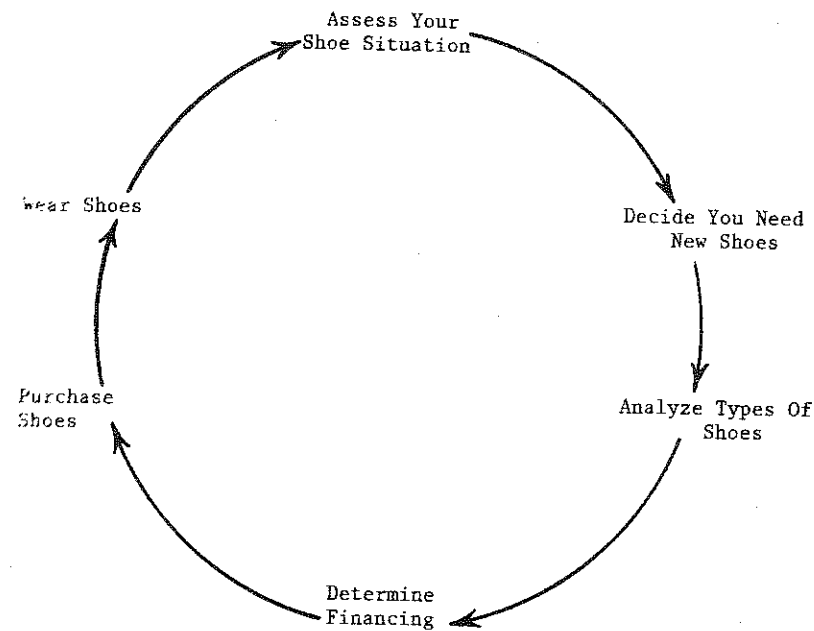
Planning sounds like an ominous term. To people outside the management profession, it has the same impact as the term, Library of Congress Classification System, to non-librarians. But when you think about it, each has a very simple explanation. L.C. is a letter/number designation that places materials on the same topic together on the library shelf. In the same way, planning is really deciding where you are, where you want to be, and how you intend to get there. Neither concept is too difficult, given proper explanation.

Development of a common sense attitude toward planning is critical to the understanding of the concept and for the use of the several techniques in planning strategy. We all plan in our everyday lives. For example, we make the decision that we need new shoes. We know "where we are" - in need of new shoes; we know "where we want to be" - in possession of a new pair of shoes. The only thing remaining is "how do we get there" - how will we acquire the new shoes?

In acquiring the new shoes we must decide what style we would like, the color, height of the heel, what they will be made from, and how much we are willing to pay for them. Then we must decide

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For Purchase of Shoes



how we will pay for the shoes - cash or charge - and the pros and cons of each approach. Once the decision is made and the shoes purchased, we realize the decision procedure must be made again in six to eight months! The process results in a circle.

This is essentially the same procedure you would apply to a library situation - where are you, where do you want to be, and how will you get there? You begin by looking at your individual situation. What do you have, how well is your program working, how long have you been doing it this way, who made the original decision and when, am I going anywhere, or is there anywhere to go? You now know "where you are."

Bearing these questions in mind, you must now choose "where you are going." In order to get somewhere, you must have goals and objectives. These are the things you want to accomplish and an estimate of how you will accomplish them. Goals indicate what you want to accomplish and objectives give you a measure upon which to evaluate how close you came to meeting or exceeding the goal(s).

To illustrate, if you have a goal to develop adult programs in rural areas of your service area, how do you determine if the programs you offer are successful? Will you be satisfied if a program attracts twenty to thirty people? Your satisfaction is influenced by the number you had previously attracted. Perhaps if you attracted ten people at the last program, your new objective is to increase the attendance by 50% or by five people. In

both instances you have a tangible means of measuring your success.

Now that you know where you want to be, how do you get there? First, you begin by collecting information to help determine the best route to a successful end. This might include examining demographics, sampling residents, assessing in-house procedures, or querying patrons. You must have a good idea of what you are trying to learn and collect data accordingly. Don't make the work too complex or you may find yourself with reams of irrelevant information. When using the sampling method, make sure your sample size is large enough to be valid and randomly selected to prevent bias. Don't panic if the results you projected are different from those collected. Use those results to revise. Look upon the results as new information and use that information for better planning.

Now you have a direction and information to mold your movement. It's like baking a cake. You know you want to bake a cake, but you don't know whether that cake will be spice or chocolate until you assemble the ingredients. What remains is to design the programs and/or services that fit your goals and objectives based on the information you have gathered.

After developing your programs and/or services, serious consideration will have to be given to the finances required for implementation: do you have adequate time to develop significant funding, how much money will be required, have you been realistic

in your financial plan, and where will you get the funds? This by no means suggests that all projects will require additional funding. Perhaps it might be a matter of redistribution of current funds. Nevertheless, dollars will enter into your design. Don't overlook staff time as a cost factor. Those persons already employed may be able to function in other capacities, but what is it costing for them to work on this new project? Being realistic about costs is an important element in planning. Also be ready to explain why you have assigned the various amounts to the various tasks.

Now you're ready to present your program. Of importance to the step that follows is a means by which to assess the success of your project. You can't wait until after the program is totally completed to acquire information about it. Data collection must be an ongoing process and may be done by using formal questionnaires or informal discussion techniques. It is also important to look at the project as it progresses. There may be things you will want to change before the program concludes. Don't hesitate to make changes as you go along. No plan is cast in stone, nor can you anticipate all factors. Be ready to act upon unexpected factors; be ready to act upon unexpected events. It is essential to modify the project to satisfy new occurrences so that the end result is a successful program. Always learn from past experiences. The greatest hazard is not in making mistakes, but in failing to learn from them.

The program is completed, and it is time to assess the results. Be honest about the results. You're always going to do some things right and some things wrong. You must analyze the degree of success of your program. What factors led to the end result? How could it have been more successful? What would you do differently the next time around? Would you do it again? Does it need to be repeated? Again, remember that one of the most important factors is to learn from the experience. Each experience has an impact on how you approach future planning procedures. Don't be afraid to learn. It feels good to grow.

The final step, one that completes the planning cycle, is to analyze the situation in terms of the just-completed program/service to determine if it should be repeated, modified, or discontinued. The librarian/planner is again at the stage of "Where are we; where do we want to be?"

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