

Planning and Reporting

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STRATEGIC PLANNING IS OFTEN VIEWED AS TOO DIFFICULT OF A PROCESS TO execute and placed in the “too-hard” basket. It is especially challenging for small- to medium-sized libraries to devote sufficient staff time to plan, communicate, implement, and assess a strategic plan. The perception that strategic planning can only be designed by senior management is entirely inaccurate. Now, more than ever, theological libraries need to demonstrate their role and value to their parent institution. The main goal is to create a sustainable and achievable strategic plan that aligns with the institution’s primary strategy. This chapter aims to present an easy guide for beginners to start the planning process, and to prepare, implement, and assess strategic plan progress during the year. Based on a gardener’s metaphor, this chapter aims to encourage solo librarians and those who work in relatively small

libraries in the developed or the majority world to set up and implement a strategic plan.

Why Is It Important?

The main aim of the process is to assure quality and assist in the continuous improvement of the library/organisation. A robust strategic plan in an academic setting adds value during the institutional accreditation process. Secondly, the strategic plan will assist with collection development planning that must be often evaluated due to the ever-changing landscape of the information environment. For non-academic libraries, the strategic plan can act as a direct plan to achieve desired goals by creating a more structural approach to managing tasks within a timeframe.

Strategic plans often begin after mission and vision statements have been created. What is the difference between mission and vision statements and the strategic plan? Haines et al. (2016, 132) state that a strategic plan focuses on a bigger scale. Roberts and Wood (2012, 10) define it as a “systematic process of envisioning a desired future and translating this vision into broadly defined goals or objectives and a sequence of steps to achieve them.”

Alignment

Saunders (2016, 4) and Cottrell (2011) state that it is essential that the library’s strategic goals align with the parent institution. To do this, it is crucial to identify the key themes in the institution’s overall plans or goals. The library is part of the larger institution, depending on its support, including financially. Therefore, it is obligated to support and align its direction to the institution’s mission and goals (Thompson et al. 2019, 49). The consequences of not aligning may result in disagreement, loss of direction, and financial impacts.

However, it is essential to note that it may be impossible to use all of the institution’s goals and align them to the library’s strategic objectives (Saunders 2016, 3). This is because not all of them are relevant or relate to the overall operation of the library.

In the absence of an institutional strategic plan, it is still recommended that conversation occurs between the library and the parent institution. This will potentially lead to a better outcome through adding the awareness of the library plan and allow the library to build congruently with the vision of the parent institution.

HELPFUL TIP Be realistic about what you are trying to achieve. If your users will not view electronic resources because of the context where they are located, e-books are not necessary to address in your strategic plan.

In a non-academic environment, the organisation you are part of or associated with is the parent institution. For example, in a place of worship, one of the main goals of a congregational library might be to reach out to unemployed people in the community. Therefore, the role of the library could potentially be assisting this group of people in finding employment by providing books on writing a curriculum vitae and cover letters.

The authors of *Strategic Planning for Academic Libraries* suggest two main questions that can help the beginning stage of writing a strategic plan (Thompson et al. 2019, 48).

- What do we hope to achieve with our strategic plan?
- How will we know whether we have achieved it?

On top of the two questions above, I found the following question useful during the preparation:

- What are the core outcomes I would like to see?

There are several strategic planning models available. For example, Stephens (2017, 133-4) uses an integrated library planning model, which is based on an integrated business planning model. Stephens argues that it is less clunky, shorter, and appears to be more systematic. The remaining essay explores one way of setting up a strategic plan.

Step 1

For a gardener, the ground preparation work is essential. To have a substantial result, thorough research is needed, such as finding out about the soil—the conditions needed to flourish and thrive. The groundwork is to conduct an environmental scan. This can be done informally or formally, such as using the appreciative inquiry method (Stephens 2017, 134) through the following areas:

1. **Identify the core outcomes** the library desires to achieve. Be realistic on what you can achieve based on the organization's capability and resources.

HELPFUL TIP Limited budget on e-resources? One outcome could be setting up demand-driven acquisitions with several vendors (Goedeken and Lawson 2015).

2. **Read about the Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) top trends** to learn about current trends and where the library is heading in the coming years (ACRL Research Planning and Review Committee 2020). From the list, you may be able to select one or two trends that are relevant and align with your library and institution's desired outcomes.

HELPFUL TIP Open access is listed as one of the trends. One outcome could be to identify the relevant titles and make them accessible to your users.

3. **Scan what is already out there and what is crucially needed.**

HELPFUL TIP If one of your goals is to set up a toy library and there is already one well established in the neighborhood, is another one necessary?

HELPFUL TIP With coronavirus affecting most countries and how libraries provide their services to their users, one library outcome could be how your library can continue to provide services to your users in a safe environment.

There is no standard timeframe for how many years a strategic plan should cover. For small institutions, a suggested timeframe is two to three years. Haines et al. (2016, 138) indicate that the strategic plan is not a static policy or document. The plan can be edited, especially to remove items if they are longer relevant.

Step 2

A gardener will often research to identify the plants that are suitable for planting for the next season. The preparation work will occur before the season and before planting any seeds. One method of preparation in a strategic plan is to conduct a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis in order to understand the library's current situation. This process does not require much planning. The facts are gathered from the formal or informal interviews from step 1 and from observing the situation around you. The beauty of this is that the points can be added or edited at any time. It can be done in a simple format, such as in a table or an Excel spreadsheet (Ebertz and Stutzman 2020, 126). Stutzman has set up an online strategic planning workbook that is easy to set up and follow.

Figure 1. Example of SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
Dedicated staff	The budget has been cut 10%
Opportunities	Threats
Outside funding is available	COVID
	Usage is going down

Step 3

After preparing the soil and knowing what to plant according to the season, the gardener is planting into the space allocated for it.

This stage of writing the strategic plan involves documenting the initiatives, action plan, and deadlines. From the outcomes, you will list one or more directions that can lead to the outcomes.

Figure 2. Example of a strategic plan (Sample Elements for

Focus	Outcomes	Initiatives
Student wellbeing	Ensure a safe environment for students	1.1 Review the library space and identify an area which it can be utilized for students to relax 1.2 Staff attend relevant training in mental health or related topic

The next step is to identify the action and who is responsible for each task from the outcomes. The fun part of the strategic plan is that there are no standard templates or formats. Therefore, it is really up to each organisation to draw it up in a way that is easy to read and understand. Action plans and deadlines are in-house (shaded grey in the table below) notes and, therefore, not documented in the public strategic plan.

See figure 2, below:

a Strategic Plan, In-house Use, 2021-23)

Action Plan	Deadlines	Indicators
Library team to look at the layout and identify the spaces that can be used	All staff involved Deadline: December 2021	Consultations meeting with library staff. Satisfied outcome from the meeting Report with recommendations completed
Get input from the student body, such as members of the student association	Advertise and identify those students that can assist. AB and AC to advertise on Facebook and newsletters Deadline: July 2021 Set a time for the focus group and gather the feedback Deadline: September 2021	Number of students participated in the focus group Documented the feedback from the focus group
Source relevant workshops or courses	SH to research on relevant courses. Deadline: December 2021	Staff attended relevant training session conducted by the Mental Health association Organised Mental Health awareness week

Figure 2. Example of a strategic plan (Sample Elements for

Focus	Outcomes	Initiatives
Student wellbeing (cont'd)	Ensure a safe environment for students (cont'd)	1.3 Seek funding to purchase new furniture that provides a more welcoming space

Step 4

The gardener's next steps are to enhance productivity by watering, feeding, and trimming the plants regularly. The concept is similar in executing a strategic plan. Ongoing assessment is essential to be effective (Thompson et al. 2019, 53). Saunders (2016, 14) states that "if libraries are not assessing their strategic goals, then they are not establishing their value or holding themselves accountable to their communities." Moreover, it needs to be integrated into the strategic plan to affirm the value and accountability.

a Strategic Plan, In-house Use, 2021–23)

Action Plan	Deadlines	Indicators
Locate various furniture suppliers for ideas and quotes	AB to contact various suppliers. Deadline: March 2022	Number of quotes submitted Shortlist to two potential suppliers
Set up informal focus groups to get feedback from our users	AC to invite users to be part of the focus group Deadline: June 2021	Number of stakeholders attended the focus groups Documented the feedback from the focus groups
Plan how the furniture will look in that space	AC will draw the plan with assistance from the supplier Deadline: October 2021	Plan submitted
AB to complete the funding application form	Deadline: August 2021 Two intakes a year	Funding application submitted

The year 2020 was a year of uncertainty—this a good example where regular review keeps the strategic plan relevant and current. The global pandemic affected the ways we deliver services to our library users. Information professionals were required to adjust what we are doing and to modify our core services and resources in a short time frame.

A change in leadership in the parent institution may affect the budget and the goals of the institution. Thompson et al. (2019, 49) state that it is essential to be ready for changes and events that will impact the planning process even after completing the strategic plan. Therefore, a strategic plan needs to have the flexibility to have room for adaptation when unpredictable events occur. At other times, the feedback you received from your stakeholders

may result in a change of direction or the necessity to modify the outcomes or directions.

Conclusion

A more systematic approach will make the strategic planning process less daunting. It may seem a lengthy process, especially when there are other pressing day-to-day matters. However, the outcomes of a well-constructed strategic plan will be rewarding when you can see the results of the set goals. As Cicero put it, “if you have a garden and a library, you have everything you need.”

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