

## *Planning: First Step in Innovation*

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I suppose there was a time when planning for an institution such as a library could be simple. I have read, for example, about an ancient Assyria librarian, whose writing has survived on a clay tablet. This was his plan for his library: “I shall place in it whatever is agreeable to the king; what is not agreeable to the king, I shall remove from it.”<sup>1</sup>

In contrast, institutional planning today can be almost overwhelmingly complicated. Those of you who have been planning in our own time might have heard something like this:

“If we are going to survive and compete in the new environment, we will have to work smarter, reinvent the organization, re-engineer our work processes, become proactive rather than reactive, and, above all, orient ourselves strategically. That is, we need a strategic plan, one with a clear vision, a common mission, outcome-based goals, and measurable objectives, identifying inputs and outputs. Also we must build into the plan risk assessments, impact assessments, feedback loops, and top-to-bottom accountability. And we should use appreciative-inquiry principles to determine what most contributes to our organization’s effectiveness.

“Moreover, we must learn to manage change, identify barriers to it, practice transformational management, and promote change-readiness within the staff. That

means we will have to change our corporate culture, abandon stove-pipe or silo-style management, flatten our organizational chart, decentralize decision-making, adopt facilitative leadership, and have managers become mentors, making our library into a learning organization. We should adopt the ‘TQM’ (‘Total Quality Management’) model, the ‘JiT’ (‘Just-in-Time’) business-efficiency model, and/or the ‘OD’ (‘Organizational Development’) model. We might even integrate organizational development with human-resource management. Also we should create a communications strategy for handling change, use knowledge management to capture our intellectual capital, create internal networks, clusters, cross-functional teams, and ad-hoc task forces, and at least consider some outsourcing. Oh, yes, and did we mention marketing? That, too, will be critical.”<sup>2</sup>

All this, of course, comes from management gurus and sometimes can be valuable. Most of you are familiar with at least some of the concepts I’ve quoted, and may even have applied them. But such advice as I wish to offer today is not intended as a prescription for planning, a grid to follow, or a complicated system to master. Rather I wish to describe a recent experience in planning at the library of Congress that seems to be working for us.

I occasionally envy the information technologists with whom we work, whose concern is only to experiment, to tinker with what is, to search for something new, to produce something better. We are trying to adapt to their new media creations while also somehow, simultaneously, retaining our responsibility for all that went before. But today’s change is so rapid! Look at how astonishingly the Internet has developed in little more than one decade. Look at how differently our patrons behave now that they can sit at home and “google” for information. How can established institutions such as libraries

adjust to all this, keep up with it, take advantage of it? And how can a complex bureaucracy such as the Library of Congress cope with rapid changes in both communications media and user expectations?

We thought we were doing well to get our card catalog online, to digitize pieces of our collection, to set up a helpful Web site. But are we still adjusting too slowly? Are we spending too little to collect not just paper-based products but also the mushrooming materials our society is creating digitally? Are we now spending enough on moving our collections from shelves to the search-engine-centered Internet? Are we spending too much on paper-era methods for reference and bibliographic control? We want to innovate, but how much innovation is actually practical?

Early in my tenure as head of library services at the Library of Congress, I realized that innovation would be necessary, and must be practical. Since “practical innovation” is the theme of this conference, I assume that your experience with innovation, and the challenges you face, are similar to mine. Therefore, I hope it might be useful to you for me to describe the re-examination that we at the Library of Congress are giving to what we are doing—a re-examination to determine what changes we really need to make, and how, effectively, to do it.

Our re-examination is taking place as part of an effort, within the Library Services division of the Library of Congress, to develop a new strategic plan, one to cover the five years 2008 through 2013. We began the process in July 2006. We began in a way that I do not necessarily recommend but that seemed necessary, given the size of our organization. Building a plan from the grass-roots up may be preferable, but with 3,000 employees, we would have had to spend way too much time processing views if we had

started by collecting them from everyone. Partly for that reason, and partly because I was new in the job and needed to give the staff an introduction to my own outlook, I started the process, for purposes of discussion, by outlining a plan. I studied the work of all fifty-three of the divisions within Library Services at the Library of Congress. Then, in one wild weekend, I wrote as fast as I could. Out of this whirlwind I drafted a set of key objectives under the following five broad goals for Library Services:

1. to collect and preserve the record of America's creativity and the world's knowledge
2. to provide the most effective methods for connecting the Library's users to our collections
3. to deepen the general understanding of American cultural, intellectual, and social life, and of other peoples and nations
4. to provide leadership for the library community
5. to manage for results.

Our division directors and I then set aside a day to discuss my draft. We went over all the goal and objectives thoroughly and made many changes. We put the resulting draft on an internal Web site and invited comment from any staff member who wished to provide it. Over the next few weeks, we reviewed comments from staff, and again reworked the objectives under each goal. Finally, we produced a document that nearly everyone found useful for elaboration.

Next we formed working groups—thirty-eight of them—to develop recommendations on how we might get from where we are to where we want to be in terms of achieving objectives in the plan. We invited staff members to volunteer to serve

on these groups, and 250 did. Our staff directors chose a coordinator for each group, and we met with all thirty-eight to talk about the planning process and what we hoped to accomplish. We asked each working group to develop a document defining its own scope of work, which the directors reviewed. In this way, by November 2006, we had produced a management work plan that included goals, objectives, and the ways in which each group expected to carry out its charge. Each accepted a deadline, which varied from two to six months, depending upon the complexity of the group's assignment.

Beginning early in March 2007, our division directors formed themselves into a review committee to read and comment on preliminary reports from the working groups. The directors provided comments, sometimes quite extensive, for consideration by the groups as they wrote their final reports. These, too, were subsequently read and commented on by the division chiefs. Then we posted, on our internal Web site, the full set of recommendations, for review and comment by Library Services staff, and for review by anyone within the Library of Congress community who might be interested. We used the comments from this review to revise the plan again, which we are now putting into final form—a plan, as I will explain later, that contains significant innovation that I think is also practical.

From this process, I think we learned five major things.

First, innovation becomes possible when most members of the staff of an institution support the need to be innovative. Support for innovation at the Library of Congress came through use of a process that engaged the staff, despite my having done an initial outline. I have described our process in some detail because staff involvement is so important. Had I issued a directive saying *we will innovate*, it would have had little

effect. But engaging staff in doing research, generating reports, and commenting on them produced thoughtful results and helped everyone realize why, in particular areas, we need to innovate.

Second, innovative results require taking time. Though the process we used took less time than would have been required by starting with a general appeal for thoughts from all staff, the lengthy steps we did take proved valuable. The working groups had to have time to do research, conduct interviews, and then vet their preliminary findings with colleagues. The back-and-forth commentaries from directors helped refine ideas for directors and working-group members alike.

Third, a staff-intensive process can build not just interest but even excitement and motivation. Informally as well as formally, staff members became involved. One heard discussions in the halls, and excitement about ideas for the plan became almost palpable. Moreover, friendly competition developed among working groups, each becoming motivated to be “the best.”

Fourth, directors must commit to and really stick to the schedule. The requirements of every-day administration made it hard for our division chiefs to take time to read, really think about, and then provide extensive comments on the working group reports. But had they not given priority to responding fully, the reports would have sat in limbo, and the enthusiasm of the staff groups would have dissipated. After a while nobody would have taken planning for innovation seriously.

Fifth, maintaining staff enthusiasm requires continuous communication about the progress of the process. Not only was it necessary that we keep the process moving but

that we let staff at all levels know, at each point, where things stood and what would come next.

Those are the things we have learned about the planning process. Now I would like to describe a bit of what our process has produced. Though our plan is not yet in final form, we can clearly see in some areas where we will be going. I am choosing areas of importance not only for our institution, internally, but also, potentially, for yours.

One of these is the area of bibliographic control. Because of recent controversy in this area, I will tell you about it in some depth.

Just about the time our planning process began, in 2006, a Bibliographic Services Task Force at the University of California issued a report asserting that libraries' "bibliographic systems have not kept pace" with "the continuing proliferation of formats, tools, services, and technologies" in the digital information age.<sup>3</sup> Within a month, a similar report appeared, entitled "The Future of Cataloging at Indiana University," which recommended, among other things, that catalogers prepare to take on "new, expanded roles."<sup>4</sup> And then, two months later, we, ourselves, at the Library of Congress released a report on cataloging. We had commissioned this report, entitled "The Changing Nature of the Catalog," from Karen Calhoun of the Cornell University Library. In the report she argued (and I quote) that "The catalog is in decline, its processes and structures are unsustainable, and change needs to be swift."<sup>5</sup>

Just a bit later in 2006, the Library of Congress announced its intention to stop maintaining series authority records.<sup>6</sup> At the time, the need for cost cutting combined with the growing power of keyword search capabilities seemed to warrant this move. We explained in our announcement, "The environment has changed considerably . . .

indexing and key word access are more powerful and can provide adequate access via series statements provided only in the 490 field of the bibliographic records.” The announcement expressed our intent to work with OCLC and others in the larger library community to mitigate adverse affects, which we believed would be outweighed by substantial gains in processing time.<sup>7</sup>

However, this precipitated a minor explosion in the library community. Librarians objected both to the decision itself and to what seemed the abrupt manner in which we had communicated it. Moreover, the SARS change fueled speculation among librarians that the Library of Congress planned much more drastic changes in its cataloging policies and processes—changes contemplated by Calhoun in the commissioned report released earlier.

Her report predicted that “the role of catalog records in discovery and retrieval of the world’s library collections seems likely to continue for at least a couple of decades and probably longer.” But, she said, “Today, a large and growing number of students and scholars routinely bypass library catalogs in favor of other discovery tools, and the catalog represents a shrinking proportion of the universe of scholarly information . . . Catalog usage, drifting downward compared to other discovery tools, may soon plummet.”<sup>8</sup>

Calhoun argued that in the short term libraries could extend “the life of the catalog through innovation and cost reduction,” and “develop new uses for catalog data for existing catalog users.”<sup>9</sup> But in the long run, she contended, library investments will be required “in new, global information systems that make research library collections more visible and that cover more of the scholarly information universe.” And she added

that “Investing in cataloging of unique special collections . . . may eventually have equal importance.”<sup>10</sup> To pay for this, she recommended in part that libraries pool “their collection efforts, freeing up materials-budget funds for reinvestment”—funds “currently locked up,” as she put it, “in building many parallel, redundant research library collections.” Libraries, she said, and I quote,

*invest huge sums in the infrastructure that produces their local catalogs, but search engines are students and scholars’ favorite place to begin a search. More users bypass catalogs for search engines, but research libraries’ investments in catalogs—and in the collections they describe—do not reflect the shift in user demand.*<sup>11</sup>

Her “vision for change” included this:

*Research libraries and their partners will deploy shared catalogs as a key component of providing affordable global access to larger, richer collections than any single institution could house locally.*<sup>12</sup>

These views received challenges from the cataloging community. Librarians generally conceded the need for change of some kind, to accommodate new information technologies and new user expectations. Library of Congress cataloguers, for example, tended to agree that users had difficulty using our catalog. But they argued that our catalog is better than realized by most users, and that the solution is for librarians to do a better job of showing people how to use it.<sup>13</sup> Critics of proposals for revolutionary bibliographic change cautioned that established principles and procedures should not be abandoned just because they predated the Internet. Nor, they said, should cost-cutting be oblivious to the value of what cataloging expenditures continue to produce. Neither

should library plans depend on the success of every technological expectation. In the words of one proponent of a thoughtfully gradual approach to change, “the future is not yet here.”<sup>14</sup>

Additionally, some librarians feared that they would have to pick up bibliographic work abandoned by the Library of Congress, a problem that would be compounded by the declining number of available, professional catalogers. Some feared that the Library of Congress would focus its cataloging narrowly on the needs only of average information seekers rather than continue to provide precise information needed by sophisticated researchers. Some librarians also asked—what, in the future, will constitute database quality? How much do we really know about user needs? Will libraries abandon the search systems of the past and turn access guidance over to commercial firms, which use mechanisms to supplant human judgments? Do Google and other search engines really understand how to help researchers? How and to what extent can libraries fit with the new world of Internet search engines?

These and other considerations arose in meetings I held about bibliographic control with the president and vice presidents of all divisions of the American Library Association at its annual conference in New Orleans last year. Because the concerns were not about just a single, changed policy, but about the broad future of bibliographic control and the role of the Library of Congress in it, I formed a Working Group on the Future of Bibliographic Control, to advise both the Library of Congress and the field at large.<sup>15</sup> Dr. José-Marie Griffiths, dean of the School of library and information Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, agreed to chair the working group. It consists of thirteen other library and information professionals, three from the American

Library Association, three from the Association of Research Libraries, and one each from the American Association of Law Libraries, the Special Libraries Association, the Program for Cooperative Cataloging, the Coalition for Networked Information, OCLC, and the Google and Microsoft corporations.<sup>16</sup>

The working group invited other interested people with relevant expertise from across the country to three regional meetings, all in 2007. The first, in Mountain View, California, dealt with “Users and Uses of Bibliographic Data.” The second, in Chicago, dealt with “Structures and Standards for Bibliographic Data.” The third, in Washington, D.C., dealt with the “Economics and Organization of Bibliographic Data.”<sup>17</sup> You can find summaries and Web casts of these meetings posted on the working group’s Web site.<sup>18</sup> And we will also post the group’s report, which we expect to receive next month.

In the meantime, while the working group started looking at bibliographic control in terms of national needs, we began to consider internally how the Library of Congress could balance two of our greatest needs—one, the need to continue to provide bibliographic descriptions for libraries, and, two, the need to be, at the same time, more responsive to today’s digitally savvy information users. These needs required consideration under two of the goals listed tentatively in the draft of our plan. One called for us to “provide leadership for the library community” while another called for us to “provide the most effective methods for connecting the library user to our collections.” Among other things, we asked ourselves, what kind of information and services do we need to enable us to find and manage items in our collections, including digital items? And can we increase access to special collections through bibliographic description, perhaps by making finding aids part of the library’s bibliographic apparatus? The

seriousness of such questions became clear when we recognized that, despite expenditures on cataloging of more than \$40 million per year, no more than 15 million of the 132 million items in the collections of the Library of Congress are represented by bibliographic records in our online catalog.<sup>19</sup>

From internal and external commentators, we received advice to use more metadata that are generated by authors and publishers, to recruit more collaborators to help us create bibliographic records, and to work with technology companies to devise new methods of describing and retrieving information. We also were advised not to succumb to the temptation to try to perfect existing records.

Out of such discussions came one clear, major recognition: Many different sections of the Library of Congress have been creating bibliographic records “from scratch.” We realized that reorganizing would be necessary to reduce redundant efforts, gain cataloging efficiencies, and move materials more quickly from our reception of them to our provision of access.

Back in 2004, we had combined our former acquisitions and cataloging operations into a single administrative unit, the Acquisitions and Bibliographic Access Directorate. This was a step in the direction of streamlining technical processes. Now, in consequence of our new analysis, the directorate is restructuring further to improve productivity, integrate digital content processing, provide more timely access, and increase the directorate’s flexibility for the future.<sup>20</sup> In this area, we are planning for more innovation, not because I decreed that we should, but because staff deliberations showed how we could. And in November, our thinking will benefit by having advice from the report of the external working group.

Now let me turn to another area. Through a similar internal process, we have identified needs for innovation in an area that may be less momentous but that also has ramifications for libraries besides our own. I refer to our traveling exhibits program. Many of you have seen our exhibits at the Library of Congress, on the road, or online.

Some of our exhibits are physically traveling this month. These include one from our Veterans' History Project entitled "From the Home Front and the Front Lines." Another exhibit currently traveling contains photographs of Russia taken by the *Moscow Times* after the collapse of the Soviet Union. And another contains color photographs taken by the U.S. Farm Security Administration to document the Great Depression, the beginnings of recovery, and America's mobilization for World War Two. In November, an exhibit now on view at the Library of Congress also will travel—an exhibit commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown versus Board of Education*, which desegregated American schools. One or more of these exhibits will go Dallas, Lexington, Omaha, and Amsterdam in the Netherlands. All of the receiving institutions will be museums.<sup>21</sup>

One of our internal groups asked how effectively this program could be a means of carrying out our draft plan's third goal: "to deepen the general understanding of American cultural, intellectual, and social life, and of other peoples and nations." The group studied our work to provide these exhibits of material from our collections to other institutions, at home and abroad. Out of the study came some thought-provoking observations. We discovered that our policies for traveling exhibits dated back to 1992, before digital technology and the Web had really developed. Moreover, nearly every member of our interpretive program staff came from a museum background, which had

given them a predisposition to think almost entirely in terms of museum exhibits. In consequence, we had limited our traveling exhibits to artifacts. Also, we had provided even those only to receiving institutions with staff expertise and environmental conditions that met our standards. In consequence, our traveling exhibits have been relatively few.

These realizations led to us see that making our program effective as a means of carrying out our educational outreach goal would require substantial and innovative change. In consequence, we are now planning a broadly expanded program, one that will reach libraries and other organizations, not just museums, and one that will focus on regions of the country, and maybe of the world, that do not have an abundance of cultural institutions. Accordingly, the exhibits we plan will make use of high-quality facsimiles that can be mounted easily by staff not trained in or familiar with museum work. And, because many libraries have open, modular designs rather than a lot of walls suitable for displays, we plan to design exhibits that do not require walls. All this will certainly be innovative for us, and it came out of the kind of staff study that is proving so valuable in our planning process.

Other working groups at the Library of Congress could tell similar stories. They are producing real change in the culture of our institution. Basics of the process have included, first, asking ourselves where we want to be five years or so from now, then putting staff groups to work on how we could get there, and asking them to begin by looking at the history of current policies and practices. We try to find out how we happen to be where we are today before we develop recommendations on how to make the transition to what we desire in the future. Again, communication about each step has been

essential so that everybody knows what is going on, and all voices are heard that want to be heard. When we have brought our work into final form, I think we will have produced not only a good plan, but also one that most, if not all, of us will feel eager to carry out. And, I think, it will be both practical and innovative.

I have one more thought that I'd like to leave with you today. In all the nitty-gritty of the planning process, in all the focusing on details of our operation and how to make it better, I have found it essential to keep in mind why we want to make it better, the big picture of role of libraries in the world. Sometimes just looking at some kind of reminder helps.

The contemporary German artist Anselm Kiefer has created a—I'm not sure what to call it. A painting? A sculpture? A wall hanging? It hangs on a wall. It looks like a huge painted canvas full of ominous hues. And at intervals spiraling from the bottom to the top, little shelves stick out from it. These shelves hold books—partially burned books. Along the base of this artwork, a kind of floorboard runs, on which the artist makes it appear as if ashes were falling from the books.<sup>22</sup> Any librarian who looks at how precariously the books are placed, and how they seem to be disintegrating, will feel a renewed sense of how crucial for human culture our mission is. Often difficult, sometimes frustrating, yes, but essential. By whatever means, in whatever technological era, we must preserve a long legacy of recorded human thought, feeling, and activity. And we must make that legacy available, not just to the “king,” but to all who can benefit from it and build upon it. That is what I hope we all remember as we plan.

Thank you.

## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> Quoted in Harris, Michael H. *History of Libraries in the Western World*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed.; Scarecrow Press: Lanham, Md., 1999; 21.
- <sup>2</sup> Deanna B. Marcum, "Library Management," article forthcoming in the *Journal of Library and Information Sciences*. Sources for concepts quoted are in the article's footnote 9.
- <sup>3</sup> Bibliographic Services Task Force, University of California Libraries, "Rethinking How We Provide Bibliographic Services for the University of California," final report, December 2005, p. 2.
- <sup>4</sup> Task Group on the Future of Cataloging, "A White Paper on the Future of Cataloging at Indiana University," Indiana University, January 15, 2006, p. 2.
- <sup>5</sup> Karen Calhoun, "The Changing Nature of the Catalog and its Integration with Other Discovery Tools," paper prepared for the Library of Congress, March 17, 2006, p. 5, <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/calhoun-report-final.pdf>, accessed 4 September 2007.
- <sup>6</sup> Library of Congress, "The Director of Acquisitions and Bibliographic Access Announces the Library of Congress' Decision to Cease Creating Series Authority Records as Part of Library of Congress Cataloging," online announcement, April 20, 2006. This announcement has been replaced by a subsequent announcement of a delay in implementing the cessation: <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/delay.html>, accessed 4 September 2007.
- <sup>7</sup> Library of Congress, "The Director."
- <sup>8</sup> Karen Calhoun, "The Changing Nature," pp. 5, 10.
- <sup>9</sup> Karen Calhoun, "The Changing Nature," p.12.
- <sup>10</sup> Karen Calhoun, "The Changing Nature," p. 15.
- <sup>11</sup> Karen Calhoun, "The Changing Nature," p. 15.
- <sup>12</sup> Karen Calhoun, "The Changing Nature," p. 16.
- <sup>13</sup> "Library of Congress Working Group on the Future of Bibliographic Control, Inaugural Meeting," 3 November 2006, p. 1 (statement by Deanna Marcum), <http://www.loc.gov/bibliographic-future/meetings/docs/LCWGMinutes110306final.pdf>, accessed 4 September 2007 (could not directly access this but located it through the working group's home page, <http://www.loc.gov/bibliographic-future>).
- <sup>14</sup> Janet Swan Hill, "LC and Us," unpublished paper presented to the Working Group on the Future of Bibliographic Control, 2006, p. 5[?].
- <sup>15</sup> "Library of Congress Working Group," pp. 1-2.
- <sup>16</sup> The members are, for AALL, Richard Amelung of St. Louis University; for ALA, Diane Dates Casey of Governors State University, Janet Swan Hill of the University of Colorado, and Sally G. Smith of the King County, Washington, Library System; for ARL, Judith Nadler of the University of Chicago, Olivia M. A. Madison of Iowa State University, and Brian Schottlaender of the University of California, San Diego; for SLA, Gary Price of ResourceShelf.com; for the Program for Cooperative Cataloging, Robert Wolven; for Google, Daniel Clancy; for Microsoft, Jay Giroto; and at large, Clifford Lynch of the Coalition for Networked Information and Lorcan Dempsey of OCLC. See "Library of Congress Working Group" op.

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cit., and “Working Group Established to Discuss Future of Bibliographic Control,” press release, 1 December 2006, <http://www.loc.gov/today/pr/2006/06-222.html>, accessed 4 September 2007.

<sup>17</sup> Working Group on the Future of Bibliographic Control, “Public Meeting Schedule,” Web page, <http://www.loc.gov/bibliographic-future/meetings/>, accessed 4 September 2007.

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.loc.gov/bibliographic-future/>, accessed 4 September 2007.

<sup>19</sup> “Library of Congress Working Group,” p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> “Library of Congress Working Group,” p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> “Exhibitions on Tour,” Web page, <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/ex-tour.html>, accessed 5 September 2007.

<sup>22</sup> Anself Kiefer (b. 1945), “Sefer Hechaloth 2002,” on exhibit in the Portland Museum of Art, Portland, Maine, July 2007.