

PUBLIC LIBRARY STRATEGIC PLANNING HANDBOOK



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What is Strategic Planning?

Strategic planning is a responsibility of the library board, a process which helps set mission-driven priorities for the library.

ARM 10.102.1158 LIBRARY BOARD, GOVERNANCE, AND WORKING WITH THE DIRECTOR

(8) The public library board, in consultation with the director, shall identify in writing what they want to accomplish in the next three to five years, and that plan shall be focused on meeting community needs. The board and director shall annually review their plan and progress made.

The result of this planning process is a strategic plan, a written plan that identifies the outcomes, or changes, you want to create in your community, and what the library needs to do to achieve these outcomes. The plan is designed to help guide the board as you work with your director to make decisions about staff and budget priorities for the next few years.

Without a plan, your library would probably continue to provide good day-to-day service, but you might not be preparing for the library's role in the community's future as well as you could with a thoughtfully written plan. If the library's budget changes, for better or for worse, a plan can help make funding priorities clear so that the board's responsibility in setting the budget is made easier. Planning can also help with achieving goals that span multiple years or require significant effort and/or funding.

- Is your community changing?
- Is it growing, shrinking?
- Are there new challenges or opportunities in your community?
- What does your community need?
- How might the library help address those needs?

Think about your library's mission. What does your community need the library to do to successfully navigate these changes, challenges, and opportunities?

You can answer these questions through your strategic plan.

Creating a Meaningful Living Plan

Focus your efforts on creating a three-year plan, so that you have enough time to implement planned activities and see results. A great plan does not need to be lengthy to be useful. In fact, a brief plan with clear, meaningful direction that the staff understand how to implement is better than a wordy document that ends up sitting unused. However long your plan is, or how frequently you update it, your board and director should be reviewing it on a regular basis to make sure it is a living document and that you are staying on track to meet your goals.

Mission and Vision: What's the Difference?

Your library's plan should serve the library's mission and vision statements.

- A mission statement is a statement of your library's ongoing purpose, value, and audience.
- A vision statement is a high-level but achievable long-term goal.

When you are writing or revising your strategic plan, it's a good idea to review your library's mission and vision statements to affirm whether they are still relevant or whether they need a refresh.

Deliverables

The goal of your strategic planning process is to create:

1. A short, achievable strategic plan
2. A process for regularly monitoring progress on your plan
3. An implementation plan, or work plan, for staff to carry out the goals of the strategic plan

Outside Facilitator

An outside facilitator can help manage much of the work of the strategic planning process on behalf of the board and can also provide an outside perspective. The facilitator can help the group keep discussions on track and ensure that important topics are addressed in a productive way. The facilitator also is responsible for making sure everyone involved has an opportunity to share their thoughts, which should help with buy-in after the plan is completed.

Your MSL Consultant can help facilitate your planning process.

The Planning Committee

The strategic planning committee should include your library director, a couple of trustees, and perhaps another staff person if applicable. If your library has an active Friends and/or Foundation group, you may also invite a representative from those groups to participate.

If your library is small, then realistically your planning community might be just the board and director. However, if you have the opportunity to include someone else in the community who is familiar with the library, their perspective could be a valuable addition to your planning team.

The library staff should create a work plan, or implementation plan, based on the strategic plan that is approved by the board. The staff should use the implementation plan as a tool to prioritize their work.

Steps in the Planning Process

1. Build your planning team
2. Gather data and community input
3. Create your strategic plan
4. Create your work plan

Identify What You Hope to Achieve

Start your planning process with a conversation between board members, the director, and any key staff. Talk about your experiences with planning and what you hope to get out of the process. This conversation will help you structure a planning process that is more likely to give you what you need.

Discuss past experiences with planning – what worked and what didn't work. This will help you create a planning process that avoids some of those pitfalls and includes the successful parts of the process.

- Does the library need more support from community members? Using a community retreat and incorporating community feedback helps build this support.
- Does the library need to accomplish some tangible, known goals? If the library is in crisis situation or needs to focus on concrete, action items consider using an internal process that reviews census data, library trends, and current library status to create an action plan.
- Do library staff and board members need to know more about community concerns? Are you in a rapidly changing area? If that is the case incorporating community feedback in your planning process is critical.

Build your Planning Team

What does the planning team do?

- Organize the planning process timeline and gather helpful documents, such as the library's current strategic plan, any city or county plans, community data (Census, etc), and anything else that will be useful information for the committee
- Identify the community stakeholders to include when gathering community input
- Assist the committee leader or facilitator in preparing a community survey
- Finalize the strategic plan that the board will review for approval

The planning team is advisory to the full library board.

Gather Data

Gather what data is already available, such as your library's budget, statistics, and community Census data from recent years. The Montana State Library's [Public Libraries Survey data dashboard](#) can help you to retrieve your library's statistics from the past few years.

Data available in the dashboard includes:

- Circulation for different formats and audiences
- Collection counts
- Number of reported library visits
- Number of public service interactions
- Expenses and revenues
- Number of programs and program attendance
- Public computer and WiFi use

Decide what additional data or input the committee needs to collect.

- Are there trends in library use that the committee needs to learn more about?
- Is there additional community data or trends that the committee would like to discuss?
- Have other community organizations created strategic plans and/or gathered community input?

Of course, the library cannot address all your community's needs, but it's important to consider these needs and trends when writing your plan to ensure that your library services remain relevant to your community.

For example: Has there been a change in the service area population since the last time the library's strategic plan has been reviewed? What about the demographics in the community – percentage of children, seniors, people below the poverty level? Has anything changed with the education or reading level in the community?

If any of these metrics have changed since the last time you wrote your plan, it would be a good idea for the community to discuss this and whether any of these groups would be considered a service priority for your library in the next three years.

What about qualitative data? In simple terms, this would mean data that usually takes the form of words rather than numbers. For example, how satisfied are people with the library building? With the library collection? With the library programs? Are there people in the community who find it difficult to use the library, and if so, is there anything the library can do to improve access for them?

Who are your Stakeholders?

“Stakeholder” simply means anyone who has an interest in or could be impacted by the library’s success.

As you begin discussing your strategic plan, think about who you serve: which communities and demographics do you see using the library? Who in your community is not using the library?

Outside the library, what does your community need or want? What are they worried about? What are they excited about?

Categories of library stakeholders may include:

- Lead library staff/staff representatives
- Library board/trustees
- Municipal/County, or other public officials
- Library Friends and/or Foundation leaders
- Staff from an affiliated regional or system library
- Local school leaders and teachers
- Business leaders or Chamber of Commerce
- Representatives from other cultural or arts organizations
- Representatives from social service agencies
- Other governmental department heads, such as police and parks
- Religious leaders
- Representatives from key civic groups, such as Rotary or Kiwanis
- Individuals from the local philanthropic community, such as a community foundation or other
- Students, faculty, and staff at nearby colleges or universities
- Residents and staff at nearby military bases
- Local labor organizations
- Homeschool community
- Representatives from certain demographics important in the community and to the library.
Consider the different age groups and other distinct audiences in your community.

Gather Community Input

Your methods for gathering community input may vary depending on the size of your library.

Consider using focus groups, community meetings, surveys, or using existing community survey data as you set your goals and priorities.

Surveys

Surveys can be a less labor-intensive way to request feedback from a large number of people so that the committee can begin to identify priority areas to discuss further. Find someone on your committee, staff, or in your community with survey design experience to help you create a small set of meaningful questions that will yield useful data. What do you really want to know? Try to limit to your most important 15-20 questions so that people are more likely to complete the survey.

You will need to be sure to announce your survey through any channels where community members will notice it. Online surveys are most convenient, but you can also keep paper copies

on-hand for people without internet access, or if you are doing an outreach event in the community where internet is not available.

One thing to be aware of when reviewing survey data is that the results may be skewed depending on users' ability to access and complete the survey. Survey data should be considered as a useful addition to your community data set but should not be the only way you are asking your community for input.

Interviews and Focus Groups

One-on-one interviews or small group (2-5 people) discussions with members from your various stakeholder and audience groups can be a powerful way to gather a smaller set of in-depth data. This could include audiences who use the library, people who don't use the library, and local community leaders.

Some questions you might ask include:

- What are the most critical needs of your community both now and in the future?
- What is your perception of the library?
- What does the library do particularly well or poorly?
- How could the library improve?
- How could the library serve you and your community(ies) better?
- What should the library look like in 5-10 years?

Community Stakeholder Gathering

Depending on the size of your library, your strategic planning process could include a larger gathering involving community stakeholders. The goal of this gathering is to gather a diverse range of opinions and ideas from your community about what the strategic direction of the library should be for the next few years.

Plan to invite twice as many people as you expect to attend in order to ensure a good representative turnout. Choose a conveniently located gathering place where people can be comfortably seated for a longer meeting. And, of course, providing refreshments is always a good idea!

The agenda for this gathering could include an overview of the current state of the library (including a summary of your statistical findings), any survey results you've already collected, and possibly state or national library trends, in addition to a discussion session covering the questions listed in the Interviews and Focus Groups section above.

Comparison of Data Collection Methods

Data collection methods vary in the amount and quality of data that can be collected and in the amount of work required to collect the data. The Planning Committee should decide what level of data gathering is appropriate for your library's strategic planning needs.

	SURVEYS	INTERVIEWS/FOCUS GROUPS	STATISTICAL REPORTS
SAMPLE SIZE	Larger	Smaller	Larger
PATRON PRIVACY	Can be anonymous	Confidential	Confidential
BURDEN	Lower for data collector and respondent	Higher for data collector and respondent	Depends on whether the statistics are automated or collected manually
TYPE OF INFORMATION COLLECTED	Self-reported; attitudes, perceptions, opinions, facts	Self-reported, unique experiences	Numbers

Create your Strategic Plan

After gathering all the data and community input you intend to collect, it's time to draft the strategic plan. Choose one person on the planning committee to write the plan draft (most likely the director if you're not working with an external facilitator). The outline should be clear based on all the conversations you've had so far. What does the library do, or what could the library do, to make the biggest difference for your community? What are a few things that you, the board and director, would realistically like to accomplish in the next three to five years?

Your library's strategic plan should include:

- The date range for your strategic plan. This will usually be three to five years.
- Your library's mission and vision statements. Your goals should always be connected to the library's mission.
- Your library's high-level goals for this time frame. Remember to focus on the three to five most important goals as indicated by what you've learned, and to write them as SMART goals (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound). It's also helpful to state the desired outcome for each goal.
- Under each goal, list the activities you intend to complete in order to achieve that goal. It's ok if this list changes over time as long as you think you are still making progress towards achieving your goal.
- Include a brief description of how you will evaluate your progress on these goals. How will you know if you're successful? What data or observations will you use to check your progress? Noting these measures in your plan and regularly reviewing them can help keep the library on track towards achieving your goals.
- Finally, include the names of the strategic planning committee members and the trustees who will approve the final draft.

Finalize and Approve the Strategic Plan

The draft plan should be shared with the planning committee for final revisions before being presented to the library board for approval. As with any agenda item requiring a vote, this should be made publicly available at least a few days before the scheduled board meeting to allow for public comment. It is a good practice for the board to review the proposed strategic plan at one meeting and then to vote on it at the next meeting, to ensure that the public has had ample opportunity to review it and provide comment.

Create your Work Plan

Congratulations, you have an approved strategic plan! Now the director and staff must take on the work of carrying out the plan. An implementation plan, or work plan, can help outline the steps to achieving your goals in greater detail.

Your work plan may include:

Details about the tasks or activities under each goal, including the time frame, who is responsible for each of these tasks or activities, what resources (including funding, space, and time) will be necessary, what the outcome or success measure will be (how will you know when the task is complete?), and the inputs, or resources, necessary for the task or activity.

Some people may find a logic model useful for organizing work plan activities. For example, here are two activities under the same goal:

Goal	Activity	Time Frame	Staff Involved	Resources Needed	Outcome	Progress
Expand library services for Young Adults (ages 13-18)	Rearrange the children's section to create a separate teens section in the library, with comfortable places to sit, hang out, and study	August-October 20xx	Director, Youth Services staff person	Funding for new table, four lounge chairs, and a new rug; staff time	Young adults identify the library as a welcoming space to hang out; more young adults use the library as a gathering place	In progress; secured donation of new table for YA section
Expand library services for Young Adults (ages 13-18)	Host a weekly board games & pizza afterschool event for teens (13-18)	Starting Mondays, September 20xx	Youth services staff person	Staff time; one-time investment or donation of 10 board games; weekly pizza order	More young adults attend library programs; young adults report feeling welcome in the library	Not yet started

While creating your implementation plan, keep in mind that staff will be busy with ongoing daily responsibilities in addition to the work entailed in the strategic plan. Not all staff work will be represented in your plan, but it is important to take that work into consideration as you estimate how much time staff can realistically spend on meeting the strategic plan goals over the course of the year.

Monitor and Evaluate your Progress

The role of the board is to monitor progress on the plan and to ensure that the library has the resources it needs to meet the desired outcomes.

To monitor progress on the plan, the director may provide updates at your regularly scheduled board meetings. The work of carrying out the plan's activities will be ongoing, and so inevitably some adjustments will need to be made.

Make your plan a standing agenda item for your board meetings so that you can understand what the library needs to keep moving towards its goals.

Evaluation means looking at what data or evidence you have to prove whether you have met the desired outcomes. What data could you use to evaluate your goal? Program attendance? Circulation? Observation? It's helpful to think about what data you will use for evaluation as you are writing your goals so that you can begin collecting that data from the very start.

Using the young adult activities above as examples: how could the outcomes be measured? *Young adults identify the library as a welcoming space to hang out and young adults report feeling welcome in the library* would require feedback from young adults. Staff could create a short survey postcard asking young adults how welcome they feel in the library on a scale of 1-5, how they like to use the library, and if they have any ideas for additional library programs or services. These postcards could be left in the YA section of the library or handed out at YA programs such as the board game afternoon.

More young adults use the library as a gathering place and more young adults attend library programs could be measured by staff observation.

The director can share the library's evaluation data with the board as part of the monitoring process.

Don't forget to celebrate your success with your board and staff!

Strategic planning takes effort, but your effort will be rewarded with a clear road map to high-quality, community-centered library services.

Appendix

Sample community survey

Public Library Survey

Please help develop the strategic plan for the X Public Library by participating in this survey. Your responses will help greatly in planning the future of the library.

The survey takes 10 minutes to complete on average. Thank you for taking the time to assist your library!

Library Use

1. When you visit the library do you regularly (please mark all that apply):

- Check out books
- Check out DVDs
- Check out music CDs
- Check out video games
- Read magazines or newspapers
- Use computers
- Access the internet
- Use the makerspace
- Download books or music
- Download movies
- Read or study
- Come for a meeting
- Come to browse
- Get help answering a question
- Use business or employment materials
- Attend children's programs or events
- Attend teen programs or events
- Attend adult programs or events
- Other (please specify)

2. If you do not use the library regularly, why not? Please mark all that apply. (Please skip this question if not applicable.)

- I don't need to use it
- I find what I need online
- Library hours are not convenient
- I use another library
- I prefer to buy my own materials
- The library doesn't have what I need
- Library staff are not helpful
- I am physically unable
- I don't have a library card

3. Please check whether you are satisfied with the following aspect of library services:

	Satisfied	Not Satisfied	Don't Use/Don't Know
Book collection			
DVDs and CDs			
Magazines and newspapers			
Downloadable ebooks and e-audio books			
Video games			
Large print materials			
Children's programs			
Teen programs			
Adult programs			
Meeting rooms			
Reading areas			
Computer access			
Internet access			
Staff assistance			
Library website			
Open hours			
Databases			

Please share any additional comments on your satisfaction with the above services or other aspects of the library:

4. Please indicate which of the following services you expect to be important to you in five years (please check all that apply):

Book collection		Computer access	
DVDs and CDs		Internet access	
Magazines and newspapers		Staff assistance	
Downloadable ebooks and e-audio books		Library website	
Video games		Open hours	
Large print materials		Databases	
Children's programs			
Teen programs			
Adult programs			
Meeting rooms			
Reading areas			

5. How could your satisfaction with library services be increased?
6. What computer technology or training would you like to have offered at the library?
7. What programs, activities, or library services do you think should be provided that are not currently offered?

Demographics

We would like to learn something about you. Providing this information is optional.

Your response to these final questions will help the library understand the results we received and the differing needs of our community members.

8. Do you have a current library card? Yes/No
9. Do you have a library card from another library? Yes/No
10. How often do you usually visit the library?
 - Weekly or more often
 - About once a month
 - 2-4 times a year
 - Rarely
 - Never
11. Are you a resident of (your community)? Yes/No
12. What is your age group?
 - Under 20
 - 20-29
 - 30-39
 - 40-49
 - 50-59
 - 60-69
 - 70 or over
13. How many children age 17 or younger live in your household?
 - None
 - 1
 - 2
 - 3
 - 4+
14. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
 - Some high school
 - High school graduate
 - Vocational/technical school
 - Some college
 - College graduate
 - Graduate/professional degree
 - Other (please specify)

15. How would you describe yourself? (Check all that apply.)

- Full-time student
- Part-time student
- Employed full-time
- Employed part-time
- Self-employed
- Retired
- Unemployed or looking for work
- Homemaker
- Parent
- Grandparent
- Caregiver
- Other (please list):

Please feel free to add any additional comments that you feel would help us plan for the future of the library:

Thank you for your time!

Sample Strategic Plan

X Public Library Strategic Plan 20xx-20xx

Mission: The mission of the X Public Library is to provide the best possible services and materials for informational, educational, cultural, or recreational use by the community.

Vision: The X Public Library supports literacy, knowledge, and connection in our community.

GOAL 1: The library will provide in-person opportunities for people to interact with each other.

- Activities:
 - Board game night
 - Book club
 - Themed community potlucks
 - Programs for seniors
 - Trivia Night
 - Bingo Night at the library
- Outcomes:
 - Increase in the number of people coming to the library for programs
 - Feedback from community members about how much they enjoy connecting with each other

GOAL 2: The library will provide services and programming for teens and their parents to interact with others and the library's resources

- Activities:
 - Host monthly Teen Book Club
 - Host a monthly activity for teens and parents
 - Single parents' discussion group
- Outcomes:
 - Increase in the number of teens and/or parents coming to the library
 - Feedback from parents about how much they value connecting with each other

GOAL 3: The library will save the time of community members by providing alternative ways for people to obtain the library resources they want or need

- Activities:
 - Bookmobile to serve rural areas
 - Survey community about open library hours
 - Advertise library home delivery service
 - Provide more Reader's Advisor services
 - Promote interlibrary loan service
- Outcomes:
 - Increase in the number of people receiving library services

- An increase in the number of items being checked out
- Feedback from community members that talks about how much they appreciate the delivery of services
- Feedback from rural residents reporting satisfaction with library services
- Increase in the number of items being borrowed via interlibrary loan

GOAL 4: The library will work to raise awareness about the community and library services

- Activities:
 - The library helps educate new community members about the library by leaving brochures at local eating and drinking establishments, schools, daycares, etc.
 - Library staff attend local community group meetings to talk about library programs, services, and events
- Outcomes:
 - Increase in the number of people coming to the library
 - Increase in the number of items being checked out from the library
 - Feedback from community members that indicates they are aware of the library and/or community and what is provided

Approved by the X Public Library Board of Trustees, Month 20XX

List of Planning Committee names

List of Library Board members

Sample Work Plan Entry

X Public Library Strategic Plan Work Plan 20xx-20xx

GOAL 1: The library will provide in-person opportunities for people to interact with each other.

Goal	Activity	Time Frame	Staff Involved	Resources Needed	Outcomes	Progress
1	Board game night	September-November 20xx (monthly)	Library Assistant	Board games; Staff time (2 hours per month); \$30 per month for snacks and beverages	Increase in the number of people coming to the library for programs; Feedback from community members about how much they enjoy connecting with each other	First event held September 20; 15 in attendance; 100% positive feedback and said they would attend again
1	Themed community potlucks	October 15	Library Director, Library Assistant	Meeting Room; Staff time (4 hours per month); fliers		Scheduled first event for October 15
1	Programs for seniors	November 20xx-April 20xx (monthly)	Librarian	Meeting room; Staff time (2 hours per month); volunteer time		Not yet started
1	Trivia Night	January-May 20xx	Librarian	Staff time; meeting space at local brewery		Not yet started
1	Bingo Night at the Library	TBD				Not yet started