

# IMPLEMENTING **TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS** IN LIBRARIES

**Techniques, Tools, and Tips From the Trenches**

A photograph of a woman with blonde hair, wearing a pink shirt, sitting at a wooden desk in a library. She is typing on a black keyboard. In front of her is a large black computer monitor. To her right, another monitor is visible. The background shows bookshelves filled with books. The entire image is overlaid with a pattern of white dots of varying sizes, creating a halftone effect. The dots are more densely packed on the left side and become sparser towards the right.

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# Identify the Library's Needs

Technology projects are successful in libraries when they provide a solution for a need, not just because the library staff wants to experiment with new technology. Yet, many libraries fall into the trap of creating a project just so they can take advantage of the latest high-tech gadget available on the market. These types of projects tend to fizzle and die. They may be cool enough to last for a short while, but if there is no driving need, the technology will end up unused or under-used, and the funds invested in the project are no longer available for a more sustainable endeavor.

Has your library ever implemented some popular technology, only to spend more time—and money—promoting it and explaining it to your customers and/or staff than actually using it? That is a sure sign that it was a bad fit for your community. Technology should never be forced upon your staff or customers. It should be part of a solution that is in the right place at the right time to meet your library's needs.

Sometimes even when technology projects are implemented in libraries to meet a need, the outcome is not as successful as the staff initially predicted. Perhaps the solution was not the best fit for the need, the project was not carefully planned, or the implementation team chose shortcuts that overlooked critical steps along the way. The road to success begins with careful planning.

## Technology Plans

Proper planning and prioritization is critical to meeting the technological demands of library users successfully. All libraries should

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create and maintain a technology plan. Are you groaning already? Has “write a technology plan” been on your list of things to do for a long time, but you have just never gotten around to it? I know the feeling. Planning takes time, and you never have time to plan because you are too busy doing other work, right? There is an ancient proverb whose original author is unknown, but the words carry a powerful truth: “He who fails to plan, plans to fail.” So take the time to write the plan if you want to be successful.

Do you need more motivation? Does your library file for E-Rate funding? If not, or if you do not know what E-Rate is, I encourage you to explore it. E-Rate is a great opportunity for schools and libraries to receive funding assistance for telecommunication and internet services.<sup>1</sup> However, one of the filing requirements is that you have an approved technology plan. Perhaps you are saying, “I know, and since we do not have a technology plan, we do not file for E-Rate.” In that case, you are missing out on some possible funding assistance. The details on that program will not be covered in this book. Nonetheless, it is yet another organization encouraging all libraries to plan and therefore to succeed.

If your library does not have a current technology plan, there are many resources available to assist you in creating or updating one. The American Library Association has put together a guide called *Technology for Results*,<sup>2</sup> which describes how to create a technology plan for your library. In addition, the online resource WebJunction has a variety of resources available to assist with the planning process, including free software called TechAtlas.<sup>3</sup> I encourage all readers to explore these and other resources more fully, if you do not already have a tech plan in place or if you want to improve your existing one.

## Plan Components

While this chapter will not go through the details of writing your technology plan, I do want to highlight the basics. Most technology plans should cover a three-year period. With the rate that tech-

nology changes, it is sometimes difficult to plan for three years ahead. Before you actually implement anything in your plan, you will want to review whether the project is still suitable for your library's needs. However, it is important to look three years down the road and incorporate goals to strive for.

The major components of your technology plan should include:

1. Your library's mission
2. Clear goals and realistic strategies for using technology to improve services in your library (with measureable milestones)
3. Staff development plan to train employees to use the technology
4. Assessment/inventory of current services, hardware, and software
5. Budget
6. Evaluation

You will find a sample technology plan included as Appendix A of this book for your review. You are welcome to use it as a guideline for your own library's technology plan. This is the plan that I use at my library. Yours certainly does not have to look like mine; it should include the major components, but it will reflect your community and your library's needs.

If you do not have a current technology plan for your library, take time to write one. Include key decision-makers at your library in the process. The plan should identify needs in all departments of the library and accurately reflect the library's technology initiatives. Technology needs exist for both library customers and library staff. Take a look at the entire picture and prioritize what needs to be done. With a good plan, many things are possible.

The technology plan focuses on the goals and the objectives for meeting those goals. Sometimes it can include details about specific solutions to help meet those goals. Many technology plans

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that I have seen define the needs (in terms of goals and objectives) but omit the details, leaving them up to the project implementation team to identify. This strategy provides the most flexibility to adapt to the ever-changing technology.

Once your technology plan is complete, it becomes your guide for the three-year period. The projects you will implement are outlined in your plan. You may need to upgrade computers, redesign your website, install new security cameras, or migrate to a new integrated library system. No matter what the project is, there is a time and a place specified in your plan to do the investigation and implementation.

As technology changes so frequently, unanticipated needs may come up, and some defined needs may fade away or be replaced by higher priorities. Therefore, your plan is an outline and should be somewhat flexible. It serves as a guideline and gives you a structure that you can use to implement technology projects that improve library services.

### **Info City, USA**

Throughout this book, we are going to walk along with a fictional library staff as they go through the process of implementing a technology solution for their customers. Allow me to introduce them to you. Once upon a time, there was a village in a state in America. The village's name is Info City. About 62,000 people live in Info City and enjoy visiting their very own public library. The Info City Public Library (ICPL) provides a varied collection of materials, access to the internet, programs for residents of all ages, and much more. ICPL staff strive to maintain a high level of customer service and support for their customers' information needs.

Your library, like ICPL, has a technology need (likely many needs). Identify the one that is the current priority for your library, based on the timeline in your plan, and you are ready to move forward.

## Endnotes

1. Universal Service Administrative Company, Schools and Libraries Program of the Universal Service Fund, [www.usac.org/sl](http://www.usac.org/sl) (accessed August 3, 2009).
2. Diane Mayo, *Technology for Results: Developing Service-Based Plans* (Chicago: ALA Editions, 2005).
3. WebJunction, TechAtlas for Libraries, [webjunction.techatlas.org](http://webjunction.techatlas.org) (accessed October 29, 2009).

