
The Public Library Association

Strategic Plan

June 2005

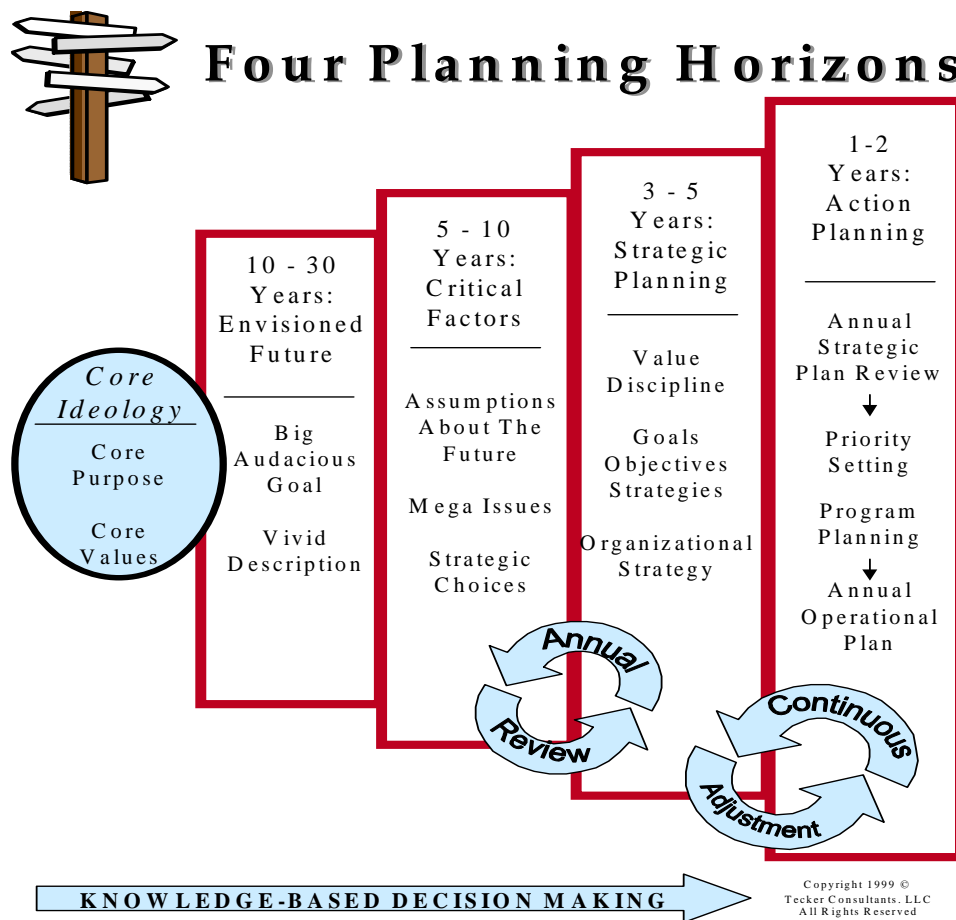
Ratified
By the PLA Board of Directors June 24, 2005

Prepared by:
TECKER CONSULTANTS, L.L.C.
427 River View Executive Park
Trenton, NJ 08611
609-396-7998
<http://www.tecker.com>

Overview

The **Public Library Association (PLA)** has embarked on a process that will lead to the completion of a long-range strategic plan for the organization. This will facilitate (a) PLA's identification of the future needs of members, and (b) PLA's options for satisfying those needs.

On **January 18-19th, 2002**, a selected group of PLA volunteer leaders met to consider strategic questions about the organization's future, and to continue the process of developing a strategic long-range plan. Glenn Tecker, President and CEO of Tecker Consultants, LLC (TC), and Paul D. Meyer, CAE, Principal Partner, led the group in the process. During the session, the group engaged in dialogue and deliberation, which yielded a number of insights. The framework used for the discussion was a model of strategic judgments organized into four time-related horizons:



Using the Four Planning Horizon's model, the group created the following:

- Consideration of factors in the long-range planning horizon (10-30 years into the future), and the articulation of a core purpose, core values, and a vivid description of future success;
- Creation of a set of assumptions about the future of PLA, public libraries, and public librarians;
- Identification of a set of mega issues (drawn from qualitative research conducted on sample of PLA's membership, but in need of further illumination) - critical questions that will need to be answered in order for PLA to position itself strategically in the future;
- Long-range visioning articulated in five goal statements with strategic objectives and preliminary strategies that identify where PLA could be in the next several years and how it can get there. The vision attempts to focus on how the organization will provide beneficial outcomes to members.

The following report reflects the draft plan created by the group

10-30 Year Planning Horizon

~ Core Ideology & Envisioned Future ~

Core ideology describes an association's consistent identity that transcends all changes related to its relevant environment. It consists of two elements - **core purpose** – the association's reason for being – and **core values** – essential and enduring principles that guide an association.

Envisioned future conveys a concrete yet unrealized vision for the association. It consists of a **big audacious goal** – a clear and compelling catalyst that serves as a focal point for effort – and a **vivid description** – vibrant and engaging descriptions of what it will be like to achieve the big audacious goal.

Core Ideology

Core Purpose: To strengthen public libraries and their contribution to the communities they serve.

Core Values:

- Provides visionary leadership ever open to new ideas.
- Dedicated to life-long learning.
- Focused on and responsive to member needs.
- Committed to a free and open exchange of information and active collaboration.
- Respects diversity of opinion and community needs.
- Committed to excellence and innovation.

Envisioned Future

Big Audacious Goal (BHAG): Make the library card the most valued card in every wallet.

Vivid Description:

1. The Public library is regarded as a critical contributor to the creation of vibrant and educated communities and is funded accordingly. It is the primary recipient of corporate giving.

2. Public libraries are regarded by the public as their first choice for facts, fiction, and the latest information technologies.
3. 100% literacy in North America is reached and public libraries are recognized as playing a significant role in obtaining this goal.
4. Public libraries are staffed by highly skilled, well trained, and competitively compensated professionals who reflect the diverse demographics of the communities they serve.
5. Public librarians are recognized as the information experts and as leaders in their respective communities.
6. Every public library in North America looks to PLA for providing education and training for their staffs and trustees. PLA members have access to affordably priced training opportunities at their convenience and that meet their professional life-long learning needs.
7. PLA membership represents 100% of North America's professional public librarians.

5-10 Year Planning Horizon ~ Assumptions About the Relevant Future ~

In order to make progress against the 10-30 year Envisioned Future; an association must constantly anticipate the strategic factors likely to affect its ability to succeed, and to assess the implications of those factors. This process of building foresight about the future will help PLA to constantly recalibrate its view of the relevant future, a basis upon which to update the strategic plan on an annual basis. As the outcome-oriented goals that will form the basis of the long-range strategic plan will be based on this foresight, annual review of these statements will be an appropriate method of determining and ensuring the ongoing relevance of the strategic plan.

Key Questions:

1. What assumptions will we make about the relevant future environment of our industry/profession/issues arena?
2. What one or two innovations or occurrences (which are not possible today) could happen – which, if they did happen, would fundamentally change our industry/profession?

ASSUMPTIONS

Demographics:

1. The need for a more diverse library staff will increase in order to reflect changing communities.
2. Library professionals will continue to age along with the U.S. population.
3. Membership in organizations will become less and less important to younger library professionals.
4. The impact of home schoolers and charter schools may affect the role of and the services provided by public libraries.
5. New immigrants from other countries without a public library system will need assistance in understanding the role and services of the American public library.
6. Demand for services to immigrant children will increase due to more immigrant family units.
7. There is a growing gap in socioeconomic conditions and the income level defining poverty continues to rise.

8. Changes in immigration laws could impact our current and future immigrant population.

Business and Economic Climate:

1. Library budgets will continue to compete unfavorably with education and public safety budgets.
2. Private fundraising, as well as other forms of alternative funding streams, will become more and more necessary.
3. Libraries must be able demonstrate return on investment (ROI) to the public and to decision-makers.
4. State, local, and/or federal funding may go away.
5. Increasing skepticism toward public funding of libraries as a public service, reflective of increasing skepticism of all public services.

Social Values and Politics:

1. Stratification of social values will increase creating more tension between conservative and liberal views.
2. National political agendas will change and the public's support for those political agendas will continue to fluctuate.
3. Public libraries will remain a symbol of democracy providing a strategic opportunity for growth and financial support.
4. Libraries are usually not "at the decision-making table" on all levels - local, state, and national.
5. The library as a place for the community to congregate will continue to grow.
6. Definitions of family will continue to change.
7. Libraries are viewed as "in loco parentis".

Legislation/Regulation:

1. The legal environment will require more time, energy, and expertise.
2. Copyright and digital licensing will be settled and will affect what, how, and at what price libraries provide information.
3. Confidentiality/privacy laws will become more complex and will affect patron use, records maintenance, and requirements for registration and perhaps marketing practices.

4. Employment law will become more complex and require greater management and increased overhead costs.
5. Funding laws and regulations on tax limitations will intensify and threaten funding.

Technology/Science:

1. Technology will allow libraries the opportunity to attract and serve new client groups--- only if library staff and volunteers appear technology savvy.
2. Technology will affect everything libraries do.
3. Technology training will continue to be a challenge.
4. If the structure of the Internet changes, the role of public libraries may change in providing validity to the information provided.
5. Information literacy.

5-10 Year Planning Horizon ~ Mega Issues ~

Mega issues are issues of strategic importance, which represent choices the organization will need to make in defining the ultimate direction of its long-range plan. These issues represent potential impediments to achievement of the Envisioned Future, and form a basis for dialogue about the choices facing the organization. These questions can serve as an ongoing “menu” of strategic issues that, using a knowledge-based approach in gathering insights relative to PLA’s strategic position and directional choices for each of the issues, can be used by the Board to create regular opportunities for strategic dialogue about the issues facing the industry.

Mega-Issue Questions:

- How should PLA assist in educating the public on all the aspects of what public librarians and public libraries do for them?
- How does PLA change the image of librarians and public libraries?
- How can PLA transfer best practices into a knowledge base that all librarians can use?
- How can PLA provide services to non-MLS library staff?
- How can PLA assist libraries in using public support for libraries in obtaining additional funding?
- How does PLA assist library staff to become more proactive in their communities?
- How can PLA assist libraries in continuing to provide value in an increasingly rich information world?
- How can PLA assist in bringing more people into the profession especially in high-level positions within the library?
- How does PLA change the perception of the industry in order to attract young people to the profession?
- Where do we go from here, what is the future of the library profession?
- How will libraries distribute information in the future? Will it be centralized or decentralized?
- What will libraries look like in the future? How will they be set-up?
- How should libraries measure success in the future?
- How will libraries train and satisfy multi-generational staffs?
- Is it more important to support public libraries or public librarians?
- How will libraries provide resources to growing diverse populations?
- What is the best organizational structure to serve the public library community?

- How do we determine the appropriate “comfort level” with technology for staff and library patrons?
- How will the association respond to the unique needs of large metropolitan libraries versus small and medium size libraries?
- How can the association assist libraries in measuring their success?
- How should the association take advantage of electronic technologies to reach more librarians?
- How does the association speed-up the decision making process in order to respond more quickly to member’s needs?
- How can PLA assist librarians in mapping their career path and making the transition from practitioner to manager?
- How can PLA work with librarians/libraries to improve their advocacy skills to support the mission of public libraries?
- How can PLA sunset ineffective roles and operations that are no longer relevant?
- How can PLA effectively manage and promote growth and development of leaders in the organization and in public libraries?
- What research needs to be conducted to assist public libraries in demonstrating their value to funders?

3-5 Year Planning Horizon

~ Outcome-Oriented Goals ~

The following thinking represents PLA's long-range goals for the next three to five years. These goals are outcome-oriented statements that represent what will constitute PLA's future success. The achievement of each goal will move the organization toward realization of its vision. The goals are not in any order of priority. All of the goals will need to be accomplished, if PLA is to fully achieve its vision.

Goals:

Goal: Advocacy & Recognition

Public libraries will be recognized as the destination for a wide variety of valuable services and their funding will be a community priority.

Goal: Literate Nation

PLA will be a valued partner of public library initiatives to create a nation of readers.

Goal: Staffing & Recruitment

Public libraries will be recognized as exciting places to work and will be staffed by skilled professionals who are recognized as the information experts, are competitively paid, and reflect the demography of their communities.

Goal: Training and Knowledge Transfer

PLA will be nationally recognized as the leading source for continuing education opportunities for public library staff and trustees.

Note: The Strategies listed on the next several pages are identified as high, middle or low priority. High priority items should begin as soon as plan is approved. Middle priorities could be started within a year of the plan's approval and low priority items should be reviewed again before pursuing.

Advocacy & Recognition

Public libraries will be recognized as the destination for a wide variety of valuable services and their funding will be a community priority.

Strategic Objectives and Strategies:

1. Increase the number and variety of partnerships with other organizations in advocacy efforts.

Strategies:

- a. Identify partners. (High)
 - **Internal to the Profession:**
 - **External Professional Groups:**
 - **Non-traditional**
2. Increase the number of trustees and friends participating in local and state advocacy for libraries.

Strategies:

- a. Increase PLA marketing of advocacy materials to trustees, friends and library advocates. (High)
- b. Expand PLA's relationship with friends, trustees and library advocates. (High)
- c. Create work group tasked with analyzing and identifying the most strategic way for PLA and ALTA to work together to enhance library development and service. (High)

3. Increase the number of libraries successfully selling their value and services.

Strategies:

- a. Develop a research agenda to support the value of libraries and library service. (High)
 - b. Develop customizable advocacy materials for public libraries. (High)
 - c. Market the Smartest Card materials directly to institutional members. (High)
 - d. Market the Smartest Card materials directly to public libraries. (High)
4. Increase the level and stability of funding for public libraries throughout the country.

Strategies:

- a. Develop partnerships for legislative actions. (High)
- b. Develop legislative network. (Middle)
- c. Develop education and/or advocacy materials that support legislative efforts. (Middle)

Literate Nation

PLA will be a valued partner of public libraries' initiatives to create a nation of readers.

Strategic Objectives and Strategies:

1. Increase the amount of PLA's tangible and intangible assets focused on literacy.

Strategies:

- a. Monitor the Every Child Ready to Read Memorandum of Understanding with ALSC and use of the brand; develop process for vetting new product requests. (High)
 - b. Maintain and market the existing product. Evaluation of the results of the initiative, (project goal was to change public library practice) should occur after materials have been in the field for at least 2 years. (High)
 - c. Task the Basic Education and Literacy Resources and Services Committee with the development of a strategy, implementation plan and evaluation mechanism for the promotion of adult literacy. (High)
 - d. Task a work group with the development of a strategy, implementation plan and evaluation mechanism for the promotion of information literacy. (High)
 - e. Direct PLA committees to develop programs devoted to all types of literacy. (Middle)
2. Increase the number of key audiences aware of services already provided by libraries that contribute to literacy development.

Strategies:

- a. Strategies, implementation plan and evaluation mechanism to be determined by other work groups and ratified by the Board.

Staffing & Recruitment

Public libraries will be recognized as exciting places to work and will be staffed by skilled professionals who are recognized as the information experts, are competitively paid, * and reflect the demographics of their communities.

* ALA will address this issue via ALA-APA.

Strategic Objectives and Strategies:

1. Increase the number and diversity of people selecting public librarianship as a career.

Strategies:

- a. Monitor, evaluate and determine the feasibility of continuing the Scholarship Pilot Programs, Spectrum and Institutional Scholars. (High)
 - a. Identify strategies for mentoring new public librarians; both in the workplace and in PLA as an organization. (High)
 - b. Monitor and evaluate the mentoring component of Spectrum Scholarship and Institutional Scholarship pilot programs. (High)
 - c. Monitor and maintain the electronic recruitment tool kit site and ensure PLA inclusion in the ALA recruitment activities. (Middle)
 - d. Plan and present programs that address issues relevant to recruitment. (Middle)
 - e. Task a work group to develop strategies, implementation plan, and evaluation mechanism to increase the awareness of PLA and public library work to high school and college students. (High)
2. Increase the awareness that library science students have about PLA and public library work.

Strategies:

- a. Provide annual update to library schools about the work of the Public Library Association. (Middle)
- b. Task a work group to develop strategies, implementation plan and evaluation mechanism to increase the awareness of PLA and public library work to library school students. (High)
- c. Task a work group to develop strategies, implementation plan and mechanism for evaluation to promote public library field work/internships available to students and to promote to libraries the importance of offering internships to library students. (Middle)
- d. Appoint a Task Force, composed of those who participated in the development of the strategic plan, to develop strategies to promote the growth and development of leaders within public libraries and PLA. (Middle)

Training and Knowledge Transfer

PLA will be nationally recognized as the leading source for continuing education opportunities for public library staff and trustees.

Strategic Objectives and Strategies:

1. Increase the number of public library staff members at all levels participating in continuing education and training opportunities.

Strategies:

- a. Create and deliver more regional and local programs. (High)
 - b. Survey members to determine CE needs. (High)
 - c. Provide new networking opportunities. (Middle)
 - d. Offer mentoring opportunities at education programs and national meetings. (Middle)
-
2. Investigate how to better align the volunteer workforce in meaningful volunteer opportunities to move the strategic plan forward.

Strategies:

- a. Expand opportunities for volunteers to get involved in single commitment association projects. (High)
- b. Explore, evaluate new technologies to facilitate broader member participation in PLA. (Middle)
- c. Increase the use of technology to further the work of the association. (High)

3. Increase the number of relevant audiences aware of PLA and its program of offerings.

Strategies:

- a. Partner with other ALA divisions, state chapters, and outside groups to develop and present programs to be presented in a PLA venue or that of an outside group. (High)
- b. Publish on topics of identified interest in a variety of communication formats. (High)
- c. Strengthen our electronic presence. (High)