**Planning: Frequently Asked Questions**

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**Q:****What is generally meant by long-range planning and how involved a process is it?**

**A:** Preparing a long-range plan that meets MBLC requirements involves a 3-6 month effort and the involvement of members of the community the library serves. There is no required process or specific instructions. Several planning processes are available to serve as guidelines for public libraries, and many plans on file are from public libraries. At present, there is no identified process specifically created for most other types of libraries, though a number have adapted the public library process for use. To date, a number of prison, academic and cooperating group plans have been completed and are available as samples. School libraries may find guidance from the School Library Media Center Long-Range Planning Guide, developed for Massachusetts.

**Q:****Do we have to do a long-range plan?**

**A:** Whether or not you complete a long-range plan is your option. However, if your library wants to be eligible to apply for any Direct Grants from the MBLC under the federal Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) program or any state funded grants, e.g. construction, then you must complete a long-range plan.

**Q:****Is a long-range plan required to meet State Aid requirements?**

**A:** No.

**Q:****Why should we do a plan?**

**A:** Planning is a well documented management tool for organizations. It has been emphasized in libraries, particularly public libraries, for several decades. The MBLC has encouraged planning since 1989 and has experienced numerous examples of its value as a management tool for libraries of all types. Libraries have repeatedly confirmed how important the process of completing a plan has been in their local efforts to gain recognition, funding, and staffing for accomplishing the goals and objectives set out in their plans. Specifically long-range planning:

* explains the library program to others
* identifies priorities, strengths and weaknesses
* provides an anchor for the development of a budget
* articulates connections with the larger organization
* provides a blueprint for future development
* creates a clear sense of purpose
* provides the basis for ongoing evaluation

**Q:****If we have done a plan, when do we have to do another one?**

**A:** Most libraries do their plans for a 3 to 5 year period. It is up to the library to determine when is the best time to completely re-do its long-range plan. For many libraries that may mean waiting an additional year or two until a construction project is completed, or until a new director is hired, or after a major change in the Board of Trustees. Sometimes, re-doing a plan rather than updating it may be done a year or two early depending upon local circumstances as well. For instance, writing a new plan before embarking on a building construction or renovation makes good sense. It is up to the individual library to determine when is the best time to start a new planning process rather than to update, but in almost all cases, updating more than two years beyond the original time frame is probably not a wise option. And for LSTA eligibility, *a library must have a new plan in place within two years after the expiration year of their existing plan*, and an existing plan is limited to a five year range.

**Q:****What is meant by an annually updated action plan?**

**A:** Long-range plans need to be updated annually by December 1. For most libraries, this means reviewing and revising the Action Plan portion of the overall original plan to reflect activities that will take place in the next fiscal year to achieve the plan's goals and objectives. For LSTA eligibility, a library must submit an Action Plan update for the federal fiscal year of the coming LSTA round. For example, by December 1, 2012 a library will submit an update for federal FY2014, which will cover activities during the period from July 2013 through June 2014. Plans that are not continually used and updated based on accomplishments or delays are ineffective and merely an academic exercise.

**Q:****What needs to be in our plan?**

**A:** The following components (from Massachusetts Long Range Plan, 2008-2012, [LSTA Policies and Procedures](http://mblc.state.ma.us/grants/lsta/plan/lsta_2008_policies_procedures.pdf)) must be in your long-range plan to meet the MBLC's requirement:

**LONG-RANGE PLANS**

Although several formal planning approaches are available to libraries, no specific method is required. Regional library system consultants are available to guide and support libraries in implementing a planning process. For the purposes of this Long Range Plan, all libraries, automated networks, and formally organized cooperating groups are required to complete a multi year (3 to 5 years) plan. At minimum, the plan must include:

1. a mission statement;
2. an assessment of user needs;
3. multi year goals and objectives;
4. an action plan for at least the first year of the multi-year goals and objectives that includes activities, with specific timeframes and/or other means for measuring progress, for achieving objectives;
5. a brief description of the planning methodology;
6. approval of the governing board;
7. annually, by December 1st of each year, an update of the action plan for the following state fiscal year (July to June).

**REVISIONS:** To maintain eligibility libraries and other organizations must keep their long-range plans up to date. Under this long-range plan all such entities will have two years after the expiration year of existing plans to complete a new planning process and file a new plan.

**DUE DATES:** New plans must be submitted to the MBLC for review no later than October 1. Annual Action Plans must be submitted no later than December 1.

**COOPERATING GROUPS:** Any formally organized cooperating group must develop a cooperative plan.

**SCHOOL LIBRARIES:** School libraries may utilize the School Library Media Center Long-Range Planning Guide. Plans may be submitted by an individual school library or by a district, however, an individual school is not entitled to apply for a grant on its own unless it has filed its own plan.

**REGIONAL LIBRARY SYSTEMS:** The plan of service and annual program and budget will serve as the planning document.

**STATEWIDE PROGRAMS:** This Long-Range Plan, to be reviewed annually by SACL with input from regional administrators, network administrators, individual librarians, and other formal and informal advisory groups, meets the planning requirement for statewide programs.

**LONG-RANGE PLAN COMPONENT DEFINITIONS**

* mission statement--a concise declaration of the purpose of an organization, specifying the fundamental reason for its existence and identifying its major service roles and the major user groups at which they are directed.
* assessment of user needs--a description of the needs of the community the library serves; includes a gathering of information based on an analysis of the population, results of surveys, and a description of the library's existing services in relation to the community's needs and/or those in other similar libraries; addresses the library's need for technology; and takes into consideration other plans developed at the state, regional, and local levels. Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), effective January 1992, every public library regardless of staff size was to have completed a review of its facility for architectural accessibility and compliance with the ADA. The needs assessment component of the library's long-range plan should include this subject and identify barriers, outline corrective action, and include a mechanism to involve community members to discuss the process of making the library and its services fully accessible to all patrons.
* multi-year goals and objectives--goals are broad statements describing desirable end results toward which the library will work over the long term, encompassing a vision of what services should be available; a goal is not measurable and may never be fully reached but will probably not change over a three to five year period; together with objectives, goals define a course of action for meeting the needs of a community. Objectives are specific, short range statements of results to be achieved to implement a goal; they define how it will be done, who will do it, and when and under what conditions; objectives are measurable, include time frames and may or may not change over a three to five year period depending upon progress made.
* action plan with specific timeframes and/or other measurements for achieving objectives--the means used to accomplish an objective including specific tasks that will be done in a given year to achieve that objective; activities should include specific timelines and/or other measure for determining when the activities will take place and how the objective will be accomplished.
* brief description of planning methodology--identification of a specific planning process, such as the PLA process or MBLC school library planning process, and any modifications to it; or, if a library has not used a particular process, a description of what was done, who participated, to what extent, how and what data was gathered, and during what period the plan was developed.
* approval of governing board--assurance that the library's trustees for a public library; principal, superintendent or school committee as appropriate for a school or district; dean, provost or president for an academic library; or other governing unit as appropriate has reviewed the contents of the plan and voted to accept it.
* annual updates of action plans--by December 1 of each year, the action plan should be reviewed and revised to reflect activities that will take place in the next fiscal year to achieve the long-range plan's goals and objectives.

**Q:****What about the Small Libraries Planning Process we used the last time?**

**A:** You may still use this process as long as the resulting plan contains the required components, and includes input from your community.

**Q:****What process can be used by a non-public library?**

**A:** Other than those specifically developed for schools and prisons, there is no specific process in the library literature for special, academic or other types of libraries. For special and academic libraries, guidance can usually be found in long-range planning literature from the professional field of the larger organization. Specifically, many academic institutions conduct planning for the college or university as a whole. Building on the larger organization's plan, the academic library will develop its specific goals and objectives, etc. including the components listed above. For assistance in completing a long-range plan, you should contact the Massachusetts Library System or our Head of Library Advisory and Development, Cindy Roach, for planning related professional materials that are available for loan.

**Q:****How should a school media center go about doing a long-range plan and how can I get help to do one?**

**A:** A school media center should contact its regional library system for information on workshops and other assistance available to them. *The School Library Media Center Long-Range Planning Guide* is available to assist you in organizing a planning committee and getting started.

**Q:****How will I know if the long-range plan I submit will meet the requirements?**

**A:** When your plan is submitted, it will be reviewed by a staff member of the Library Development Unit. If it is a new plan, being submitted for the first time, it will be reviewed to insure that all of the required components are incorporated. The most commonly forgotten component is the approval of the governing board. Please remember to incorporate the date the plan was approved by your board somewhere in the document or have your board sign and date the document. And don't forget to put the name of the library and town on the document! Once the review is complete, you will receive a letter informing you that your plan meets the requirements or that it does not. If it does not because it is missing certain components, you will be asked to consider making some revisions. If it is an updated Action Plan, a staff member will review it to insure that activities included are for the appropriate fiscal year. You will also receive a letter informing you that it does meet the requirement or why it does not. The most common mistake in Action Plans that are submitted is that they are for the wrong fiscal year. You should always be looking to the fiscal year ahead, not the current or past one.

**Q:****How do I submit our plan?**

**A:** You may submit Long-Range Plans and Action Plans to Rachel Masse by email at[rachel.masse@state.ma.us](mailto:rachel.masse@state.ma.us) or by mailing them to her attention, 98 North Washington St., Suite 401, Boston, Massachusetts 02114.