

Developing a strategic plan

ACRL focuses on the future

by Tyrone H. Cannon

In 2003, ACRL initiated a long-range strategic planning process to begin developing a new strategic plan that will guide the association for the next five-to-ten years and provide an ongoing process for thinking and planning that will be integrated throughout the organization. ACRL engaged Tecker Consultants to lead the association through the strategic planning process, which included extensive interaction with ACRL members, leaders, and staff to gauge the present state of the academic and research library profession, the role of ACRL within that community, and implications for the future.

The approach used in this planning process was designed to help ACRL develop strategies across four planning horizons: action planning (one-to-two years out), strategic planning (three-to-five years out), critical factors (five-to-ten years out), and envisioned future (ten-to-thirty years out). This type of planning requires that ACRL balance its core purpose and values, which must not change, with the transformation that the association must make to align with the envisioned future. The ultimate goal was to develop a strategic plan that would not only provide ACRL with a roadmap for the near future, but prepare the association for changes in the long term.

The strategic planning process has required ACRL to take a step back from itself to gain perspective on what drives the organization and its members. This was largely accomplished through a series of data-gathering exercises, which engaged members, nonmembers, and leaders in focus groups, dialogue sessions, and quantitative surveys.

The ACRL Board reviewed the data provided, added its perspective as ACRL's elected leaders, and developed a draft plan. Feedback on this draft plan was gathered through discussion with members at the Midwinter Meeting, and the Board has considered this feedback in developing the final plan. Below is an overview of the key points of information that informed the creation of our new strategic plan.

What we learned

Qualitative telephone interviews, focus groups, and the online membership survey all revealed that the impact of technology on the profession and the need for librarians to be campus technology leaders is a top issue for academic and research librarians today and a concern for the future. Budget challenges also emerged as a primary point of concern. Both of these issues speak to the need for a strong professional association to

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support academic and research librarians in a rapidly changing environment.

Through the membership survey, which was sent to 6,600 ACRL members with current e-mail addresses and received 1,403 responses, ACRL developed the following snapshot of the membership and their thoughts on the profession and the role of ACRL.

Key findings

The typical ACRL member has not changed much from previous surveys. An ACRL member is most likely white (87%), 45 to 55 years old (39%), and has been a member of ACRL for 10 to 14 years (21%). She (75% of members are female) most likely works in a university (44%).

Technology, copyright, and customer service are key issues

In the 2000 survey, close to 66 percent of respondents highlighted impact of expanding technologies as the most critical issue they face as librarians. In 2003, this issue has increased in importance, with 95 percent of the respondents rating the impact of expanding technologies as a very important or somewhat important issue to them in their job. The next three most highly rated issues were intellectual property/copyright, customer service, and the changing roles of librarians.

Members interested in professional development

Throughout the survey members expressed the importance of professional development. When asked to indicate the importance of ACRL services, 69 percent of respondents indicated that ACRL's professional development services are very important to them. According to 52 percent of the respondents, professional development opportunities are very important in their decision to renew their ACRL membership. And 24 percent of the respondents mentioned the ACRL National Conference, preconferences, and workshops as the most important service that ACRL provides; only publications were mentioned more often.

New directions for ACRL

When members were asked to identify programs, activities, and services not currently

being provided by ACRL that would be most beneficial to them, the responses strongly supported increasing electronic medium for existing and new programs. Twenty-five percent of the respondents mentioned services in this area, including an e-journal, electronic conferencing, and online continuing education.

Member participation

Among those completing the survey, participation in ACRL activities has dropped slightly since the 2000 survey. Sixteen percent of respondents are members of a section committee, 16 percent are members of a discussion group, and 13 percent are members of an ACRL committee. These numbers all represent about a 4 percent decrease from the 2000 survey.

Members have increased their activities in sections: 91 percent of respondents indicated that they belong to one or more sections, compared with 76.5 percent of members in 2000. The three largest sections represented among the respondents were the University Libraries Section (16%), the Instruction Section (16%), and the College Libraries Section (11%).

Our members are also active in their regional organizations: 27 percent of the respondents belong to their state library organization and 22 percent belong to their ACRL chapter.

ACRL as a virtual association

In an environment of rapidly expanding technology, many opportunities exist for ACRL to become a virtual association. ACRL members responded positively to the possible addition of electronic programs, products, and services, such as the 61 percent who indicated that they were very interested in library statistics available on the Web, and the 45 percent who were very interested in electronic magazine and journals. Members also expressed a high level of interest in electronic newsletters and Web-based continuing education. (Ed. note: ACRL members may not all be aware that ACRL has made its journals and newsmagazine available online and offers Web-based CE, with a plan for expansion).

Publications

Our members see ACRL publications as an invaluable service. An overwhelming 92 percent of respondents indicated that *C&RL*

News is very useful or somewhat useful in their job; 90 percent of respondents indicated the same enthusiasm for *C&RL*.

Respondents also expressed their approval by indicating that ACRL publications were important in their decision to renew their ACRL membership. And publications received the most responses (29%) when respondents were asked what programs, activities, or services ACRL should continue above all others.

Academic focus most important reason for ACRL membership

Academic focus is still the most important reason for keeping an ACRL membership. Listed as the most important reason in 2000 and in 2003, 78 percent of the respondents indicated that academic focus was a very important reason for renewing their membership.

Address your professional concerns and interests was the second most popular reason for renewing membership and was chosen by 59 percent of the respondents. Other activities that were rated highly according to importance as a reason for renewal were: access to ACRL publications, contact with other library professionals, and professional development opportunities.

Unveiling the new strategic plan

The information garnered from the membership survey and other data-gathering exercises played a key role in the development of the new strategic plan. This input from members and other academic and research librarians informed the thinking of the ACRL Board and allowed them to develop a meaningful and forward-thinking strategic plan for the association.

The final strategic plan will be shared with members at the ALA Annual Conference in Orlando at Leadership Council, Friday June 25, 2-4 p.m., which is open to all ACRL members. We look forward to implementing the plan during summer 2004.

We are confident that the new strategic plan will enable ACRL to embrace the challenges of the future while continuing to be true to its core values and serving the needs of academic and research librarians. ■