

# So You're Going to Build a Building!

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## ABSTRACT

This paper is a brief review of the early planning stages for remodeling or building a new library space. The role and relationship of the principals are discussed including the librarian, advisory committee, central administration, consultant and architect. Some pointers are given on the selection of advisory committee members and on the choice of a building consultant and architect. In addition, the paper reviews the development of a building program statement, its purpose, and what it should contain.

## THE PLANNING

The word has come! After fighting an uphill battle for years filled with figures, comparisons, and pleading, the administration has finally conceded the need for a new library building or addition.

What now? Most of us want to do exactly the wrong thing. We want to get out graph paper and pencil and lay out the perfect library. If we do that the results are likely to be a slightly modified version of our present building with a few of the problems corrected and, of course, a lot more space nearly everywhere. But is it likely that the library which should serve you for the next twenty years will resemble the one you've lived with for the last twenty years?

New technology, new users, new equipment, and most important, new concepts of library service will require physical accommodations which allow innovation and flexibility. The first thing to do then, is to recognize that you as the librarian are not able to originate all the ideas about the proposed new space, nor should you. You need to create a team whose members represent various points of view and whose experience and expertise can help you to make intelligent guesses about the future: administrators, users, staff members, a consultant and an architect.

The first and most important team member is the librarian. It is the librarian who is expert in the operation of libraries. Don't let anyone demean that knowledge or remove you from the central role you ought to play in planning a new library space. The best way to assure a central position is to anticipate everyone else. When a decision is announced to commence planning for a new building (or before, if possible) have a plan of action ready on paper. Know who the team members should be or how they should be chosen. And be prepared to argue with a supervisor who wishes to appoint someone else to lead the planning process. How can anyone see you as the leader of the operation after the unit is built if you have played an inconsequential part in its planning? Doesn't your supervisor want the project to succeed; doesn't she want you to succeed? The project won't and you won't if she doesn't support you on this central issue. When the library is a part of a larger project, you must fight even harder to gain control of the library planning. Plan-

ning libraries is not like planning classroom, laboratory or seminar space. Libraries require greater load bearing capacity, more flexibility and greater concern for user comfort than other spaces and nobody knows about those special needs as well as the librarian. The library needs its own planning team even if the library is part of a larger building project. Of course, you will have to share an architect, but that's not the end of the world if the architect will concentrate upon library issues when necessary and if your supervisor reinforces your role as arbiter for decisions about the library.

Once you've been given responsibility for the project, you've got to keep it. You must appear knowledgeable (do your homework); you must be willing to listen and be able to incorporate other people's ideas and to compromise; you've got to run tight, productive meetings; and you've got to respond quickly to the suggestions made in those meetings.

One important component of the planning team to establish at an early date is the Library Building Advisory Committee. Get a higher up to appoint the members based on your recommendations and make sure you are chair. This is your advisory committee. Avoid making it too large, but be sure to include representatives from users, management, library staff, and other constituencies as appropriate: the Friends of the Library, or the Citizens Advisory Board for your center or campus if there is one. Don't be afraid to include one or two of the library's critics, but don't overbalance the committee with them either. Make sure the members understand they will a working committee.

If possible, get the committee appointed early enough to allow you to educate them before they will be making decisions or recommendations. Field trips are useful at this point, especially if the group needs to have their horizons expanded. As a consultant, I have more often found a paucity of vision than too much imagination. Don't visit libraries which are just like yours, or even just like the one you think you want. Get your own creative juices flowing. That won't happen if you don't challenge yourself and the committee with new ideas, even ideas that seem opposed to your own.

At an early stage assign committee members to talk with the constituencies they represent. What would people like? How would they use the library if it were different? What are the best features of the present library? Have they seen libraries elsewhere that they liked? What did they like about them?

In these early stages select a library building consultant. It is critical for the consultant to work with you and the committee at this point. A good consultant should know about libraries and should be able to challenge you to think through your own problems clearly. Without clear thinking at this point you won't arrive at good solutions and that is what any library building is: the solution or a series of solutions for a complex set of problems arising from storing materials, housing workers, and serving a continuing public need for information, recreation or cultural enrichment.

Consultants are intimidating, particularly if they come from far away, have (well) known names, and work at prestigious institutions; but you hire them the same way you hire another employee. You identify who's available; invite them to apply for the position; and base your selection on interviews and written material using criteria important to you.

Lists of building consultants are available from ALABAMA and often from State Library agencies. However you can compile your own list be getting recommendations from colleagues, calling the directors of recently constructed libraries, or checking with the Dean of your regional library school. Once you have the list, write them giving information about the project, your

proposed schedule, the size and likely cost of the project, and your expectations of the consultant. Ask the consultant to respond with a list of projects completed, her fee schedule and other charges, and a brief statement of interest in the project. In the meantime you and the Library Building Advisory Committee should establish the screening criteria you will use to evaluate responses. Each list will be slightly different, but the basics include:

- 1. The technical competence of the consultant,
- 2. The consultant's knowledge of organizations like that of your parent organization and their particular problems,
- 3. The extent to which the consultant will make use of the abilities, knowledge and experience of staff members in your library and your organization,
- 4. The reputation of the consultant among other librarians,
- 5. The consultant's expertise with regard to your proposed project (new construction, additions, renovation),
- 6. The consultant's experience and education with regard to library buildings,
- 7. The extent to which the consultant makes use of her abilities, knowledge and experience as a change agent or evaluator, and
- 8. The personality of the consultant and her personal manner in working with organization members and community.

Let me say a few more words about building consultants. You need them, even an experienced librarian needs them, to provide special knowledge about library problems and their solution in spatial terms. You need them to challenge your own thinking, and that of the committee, to see your problems and their potential solutions as they really are. You need a consultant to serve as the voice of experience and expertise in disputes with administrators, committee members, and other critics; and you need them as guides to help you along the way.

Consultants compute their fees in varying ways, but they usually charge a daily fee plus expenses. Fees vary with the area and with the experience of the consultant, and a spread from less than \$200 to more than \$500 per day is not unusual. Expenses include all travel costs, secretarial costs if you require anything in addition to basic reports, and other incidentals. It is rare that a consultant's fee and expenses will constitute a major consideration in the cost of a building project. If you're on a tight budget, most consultants will be happy to estimate costs of various assignments as you go along. Remember, however, that an investment in consulting fees when a building is built or expanded should provide a continuing return as long as the building is used. The resulting building should support more efficient library operations, allow changes in operation with greater ease and less expense, and provide a better environment for materials, staff and users.

A consultant should be hired as early in the project as possible and the contract may continue through the construction phase of the building. A consultant may be hired to help with any portion of the project, although it is useful to have the consultant throughout the duration of the planning and building phases. A consultant can generate ideas, guide in site selection, help to write the program statement, help in the selection of an architect, review drawings and layouts, help in the writing and acceptance of specifications, check whether the builders are executing the project as they should, and finally, guide you in planning and making the move.

The next step in the planning process is to begin the written program statement. The first portion of the document on which you, the consultant, and the committee should concentrate is a section on concepts of library service. In it you will clarify for yourself, the architect, and other readers your institutional conception of library service. Should the library have open or closed stacks? Should it function as a general study facility or is it open only to researchers. Will the

library accommodate the public as well as students and research fellows? What sort of ambience should the library possess? Will the collection be comprehensive or restricted to a narrow subject field or to materials published within a given period? Will the facility provide services which extend the traditional concept of the library such as typing rooms, microcomputer facilities, listening rooms, meeting rooms, and/or media facilities and collections? Does your organization view the library primarily as a service unit or as a repository for collections or something in between? What is your library's conception of service, of what does it consist and to whom is it extended?

I'm sure you can see what an important document this is. In essence it establishes a contract between the library and the parent organization in which both agree to the parameters of what the library is authorized to do. Writing such a statement requires more than putting words on paper. A good, clear statement requires debate within the committee and with the organizational administration. The role of the consultant will be to push the librarian and the committee and organizational administrators to explore all of the options and to seek beyond their own existing views of library service. The written statement will be the result of discussions, negotiation and prognostication about what the future holds. A good statement of your library's concept of library service makes writing the remainder of the program statement easier. It contains the kernel of decisions about space and relationships which are the material of the remainder of the document. There is some debate about who should write the building program statement. My own advice is that, if at all possible, the library director should do it. No two library operations are exactly alike and the library director is in the best position to assess the new and continuing needs of her library. Writing the program statement keeps the library director clearly in charge of the planning process. However, writing a program statement is time consuming and tension producing. To do it well, a library director must be given time away from other tasks. That is not always possible, particularly when there is no assistant prepared to step in to assume managerial or service responsibilities. In that case, the consultant might be asked to write the statement. She will be familiar with the process and may be able to accomplish it more expeditiously than the library director. But the document will reflect her perceptions of the library's problems, and her prejudices for particular solutions. A program statement written by a consultant must be read with great care and more than a little skepticism.

In addition to a section on your concept of library service, a building program statement usually includes several additional parts. (I've given you an outline prepared by Frazer Poole, a consultant with whom I worked on my first building project. I have used the outline several times and it has always been helpful.) The program statement usually begins with an introduction filled with acknowledgements and a brief statement of the purpose of the document. The purpose of a program statement is to inform the architect of the program of activities which the library proposes to provide in the future. You remember the goal of modern architects, at least since Louis Sullivan, "Form follows function." The program statement describes the function, the architect's job is to provide the physical form which facilitates the functions you have described. Although the primary purpose of a building program statement is to inform the architect, its writing is the occasion for searching thought about the library's purpose and function, and its publication will help to inform users, fund raisers and financial backers, administrators and legislators, and the many others who have an interest in the library and its future.

A program statement usually carries a section which describes the institutional background and another dealing with the library background. These deal primarily with the history of the library and the institution which it serves to give the architect and other readers some sense of

the larger purpose of the institution and an indication of progress up to the present need for new library space.

Most program statements devote a section to architectural considerations such as the need for flexibility, issues surrounding site selection and architectural issues arising from the siting of the new library space. In addition, the committee, the librarian, and the consultant may wish to make certain recommendations about the climate within the library as well as lighting factors and other matters which might influence the architecture of the building. The largest portion of any program statement is given over to detailed discussions of each area in the new space. The function of each area is discussed as well as the relationship of that function and space to other functions and spaces.

The old advice to consider "who, what, when, where, how" holds pretty well here. Who will use the space? Which staff, which users and how many of each? What will they use the space for? What equipment and materials must be present in the space? How often will the space be used by the people identified and when? Where will the users and staff come from when they occupy this space and where will they go after? How will staff, users, equipment and materials interact in this area? How will materials or information be accessed?

Let the consultant help you to ask and answer these questions. Provide time for the consultant to meet with you and staff members who have been and will be working in these areas to assure that you've explored every area fully. No area is too small for full investigation. Some staff members spend entire days at a desk in a small alcove. A poor arrangement in such a work area can mean thousands of hours of wasted time over the years. I have seen 15 page program statements written about a single work station. Of course, I'm not suggesting such detail in a building program statement. However, you must have a clear idea of what you are trying to accomplish in every area of the building. If your description answers all of the who, what, when, where, how questions, the architect should have a clear picture of what kind of physical space is needed and how it should be configured. Just incidentally, such a detailed examination assures that the librarian and staff have really thought through the situation. I've seen many instances in which such an inquiry resulted in improvements even in the old building.

Usually, the writer of the program statement makes an estimate of the space required for each functional area. I've provided two handouts which will help in making these estimates. The document headed "Unit Area Allowances for Libraries" is based upon California state standards for academic libraries, and the information on the other sheet has been gleaned from a number of sources now, unfortunately, forgotten.

Finally, the program statement should provide a space summary. It's just a chart listing all the space estimates you've hidden in the text of the statement. Listing them on two or three pages at the end will save you hours of time in finding what you've estimated.

A program statement of any length should have a table of contents. It's a time saver too. Some program statements add an alphabetical list of special concerns which don't seem to fit anywhere else. For instance, "Clocks. Clocks should have large dials easily read at a distance of 15 or more feet. They should be located in convenient and conspicuous places so that library users will notice them. If there is more than one floor, they should be located at the same places on each floor, i.e. above the entrance to the stairway, or near the rest room doors..." At long last, the committee, consultant, and you are used to working together productively. The program statement has been written and critiqued by all and sundry, and you've been given the go ahead to hire an architect. Hiring an architect is an important step, but it's no more difficult than anything you've been

through to this stage. Much of what I said earlier about hiring a library building consultant can be repeated about hiring an architect: identify potential architects; request written responses; and interview those who appear to meet your needs. Judge architects as you would any other potential employee. Among the considerations in making a decision are the following:

- 1. Ability to meet time lines. Time is money and planning delays cause construction delays.
- 2. Ability to work in the area. Your architect must be prepared to respond to needs of the project on location both during the planning stages and during construction.
- 3. Square footage costs. The AIA has established a formula for determining costs per sq. ft., and it's best to require all firms to talk in these terms. However, the cheapest job is not necessarily the best job.
- 4. Experience of the firm. Lack of experience in planning libraries should not necessarily rule out an architect, but it might be unwise to choose an architect whose only experience has been with homes and domestic projects.
- 5. Fee. Fees vary considerably and should be discussed. You should know what the fees cover such as degree of inspection during construction, training of maintenance staff to operate the building, etc. You need not hire the architectural firm to handle interior design work; often a separate firm is used.
- 6. Compatibility. Can you get along with the principals of the firm or project architect? Do you like their style and manner?
- 7. Recommendations. Get letters from friends, colleagues and those who have used the firm's services in the recent past.
- 8. Review of projects. Review recent work of the firm, but investigate the problem presented to the architect as well as the architectural solution.

Such an investigation may explain aspects of the solution which seem inappropriate. The architect works for a client who has authority over the final solution. Usually, all members of the building advisory committee are present at an interview with architectural candidates. You must decide ahead of time how you will solicit advice from each and how you will make your wishes known to the administrative officer who will make the final decision. A warning: architectural firms have many resources at their disposal; presentations can be filled with razzle dazzle. Be sure to look beyond the presentation to the substance of the architects's proposal and to her ability to work with you and your colleagues on your project.

Today, I've tried to provide you with an orderly process for setting about the early stages in planning a new library building or addition. Establishing a strong working team, and developing a thoughtful written program statement are essential if the building project is to be a success. They furnish the foundation for a long and demanding process. I don't know whether it's more appropriate to wish IAMSLIC members bon voyage or smooth sailing, but either will be more likely if you start your journey well.