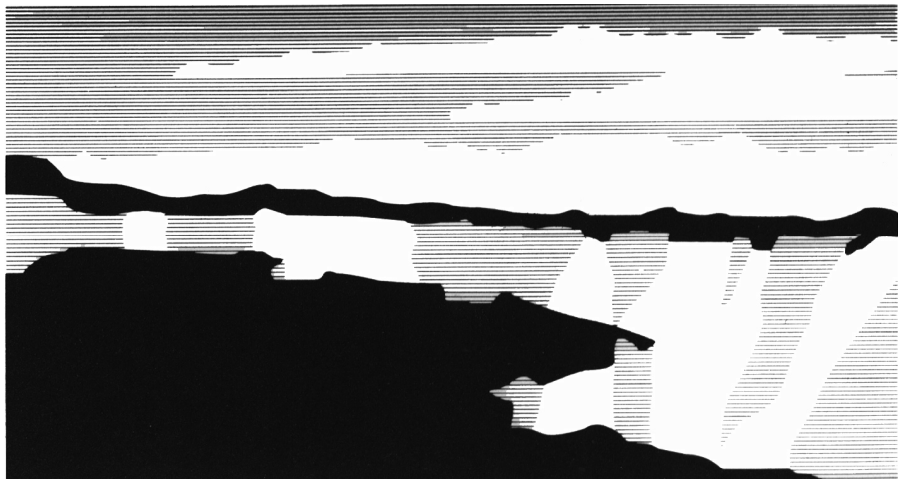LA-UR-97-1203

Title: **LOS ALAMOS NATIONAL LABORATORY RESEARCH LIBRARY: Integrating the Present with the Future**

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Los Alamos National Laboratory Research Library: Integrating the Present with the Future

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Abstract

Today, staff members at Los Alamos National Laboratory Research Library face the multiple challenges of limited resources, evolving technologies, and changing customer needs. In order to balance today's products and services with tomorrow's strategic direction, we must focus on the present and the future at the same time. We must understand our current products and services, customers and suppliers. We need to continuously work to ensure that we satisfy customer needs. In addition, we must build the groundwork for future innovative products that anticipate customer needs. By planning for future needs while providing today's products, we will successfully move into the 21st century as a valuable resource for researchers at Los Alamos National Laboratory. I will outline our current process for balancing present and future Library products and services through use of a fully integrated business planning system.

At the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) Research Library, we use an integrated planning process to meet today's customer needs and anticipate tomorrow's future products. In this paper I will outline our planning process. I will also provide some examples of the challenges we face today in the Research Library to highlight the importance of following a systematic planning approach.

Our integrated planning process includes four major elements that build on each other: operations, strategic planning, performance assessment, and business planning. This planning process must balance daily operations, which deliver today's products and services, with strategic planning, which prepares for future products and services. Each element of the plan has specific processes and products that enable us to focus on improving today's operations and anticipating tomorrow's strategic direction. Each element will be discussed before we look at challenges facing the Research Library today.

The Integrated Planning Process

1. The Operations Process

Los Alamos National Laboratory Research Library Mission: "In partnership with our customers, we increase the access to and ease of use of our products and services." This mission defines the reason for our existence. To determine how successfully we are accomplishing our mission, we evaluate six business goals that measure our operations:

- Increase our customer satisfaction/loyalty
- Provide value-added products and services to our customers

- Increase staff productivity
- Increase workforce capabilities and expertise
- Increase our prestige, both within the Laboratory and in the library world
- Meet all compliance and budget targets

An important question for our organization is, What is the most effective way to provide Research Library products and services to our customers? Our current products are journals, books, technical reports, and electronic databases. We provide a suite of services that support these products, including answering questions, providing literature searches, delivering journal photocopies, and scheduling training for customers on using our databases. We need to understand the steps involved for each product/service so that we can determine which ones should be maintained or improved. We are formally organized by products and services, and the process teams for each are responsible for documenting and evaluating the processes for their respective products or services.

We depend on many suppliers to provide us with our four Library products. Since time is of critical importance to our customers, we are working with suppliers on their product delivery cycle. We use contracts that specify the important service or product characteristics, and spend the time and effort communicating our requirements to our suppliers. We also partner with suppliers to test their products with our customers.

We follow a documented process to understand our customer needs so that we can successfully provide products and services that are valuable to them. We maintain a customer list for each product and service and conduct individual interviews with our present customers to determine what is important about each product or service. For example, our customers have stated repeatedly that journals are our most important product and that they value having the current journal issues out on the display racks as soon as they are delivered to the Library. Because of this information, we have focused on simplifying our journal check-in processes, emphasizing quick delivery to the display racks. This focus has led to speeding up the process of receiving, checking in, and shelving our new journal issues so that these steps now takes less than half a day. We take daily measurements to ensure that this time from receipt to delivery is maintained.

We also survey one-quarter of our active customers every three months to determine how satisfied they are with our products and services. This helps us to determine trends and changes in what's important to our customers. Recently, they have emphasized that they want to access our electronic databases using Web interfaces. As a result, we have been producing our new bibliographic databases using a Web interface. We also collect and analyze unsolicited customer comments or complaints. These combined data provide us with updated information on what is happening or changing from the customer's point of view. When we receive complaints about a specific product or service, we conduct follow-up interviews to determine the causes of dissatisfaction. These interviews enable us to focus on the specific part of a process, so we can improve what will positively impact customers. Last summer the most common complaint from our customers was the poor quality of our photocopy machines. We were able to use this customer data to obtain funding from our sponsors for new machines.

It is essential that we understand our operational processes, develop good communication with our suppliers, and know what's important to our customers. By tracking data in these areas, we better understand the status of each process. We can then improve processes and effectively provide those products and services that are most important and satisfying to our customers.

2. The Strategic Planning Process

The basis for our strategic planning is the Research Library's vision. The strategic planning process addresses future directions that will support our mission and help us move forward toward our vision.

Los Alamos Research Library Vision:

- We will redesign the Library for the 21st century to increase our competitive advantage.
- We will focus on knowledge management skills as the basis for our strategic direction and move strategically to provide information integration to our customers.
- We will use integrated operations, planning, and assessment methodology to systematically focus our efforts.

Our strategic thinking and planning could be affected by external events. We gather information from the outside world in several areas to help us assess these possibilities. These areas include the following:

- Customer market trends
- New products and services
- New process methods
- New technologies
- New suppliers
- Laboratory strategic plans

We analyze trends in these six areas to identify specific actions that could move us in a strategic direction to support our mission and vision. This data is reviewed as part of our performance assessment and as input to the business planning process.

3. The Performance Assessment Process

The purpose of the performance assessment is to determine the status of our processes, develop plans for change, and gain knowledge about changes in customer needs, business trends, and strategic directions. We formally assess the information from our Research Library processes quarterly to determine where we are today and how we will move ahead in the future. The Process Management Team, which includes process owners for each product and service as well as for customer management, data analysis, and business support, completes the assessment during a three-day session scheduled quarterly. The assessment includes formal evaluations on the following topics:

- Process Definition Assessment: Do we know what our processes and who our customers are, and are we collecting data on the process features that are most important to the customers?
- Quality Assessment: Does our current performance level meet performance standards developed by the process team?
- Customer Satisfaction Assessment: What are our customers saying today about our products and services? What are the sources of dissatisfaction?

- Business Results Assessment: Do our current products and services support our mission?
- Strategic Assessment: What are the potential areas external to the Library that may affect the direction of our future products and services?
- Benchmarking Assessment: How do our processes measure up against external businesses that are considered best of class?

During the assessment, we measure our current status, consider future trends, and develop a list of issues from each assessment topic. After we complete the assessment, we use these specific assessment issues to drive the business plan.

4. The Business Planning Process

In this fourth planning process, we develop our business plan, which includes a set of strategies and tactics. After evaluating the issues generated in the performance assessment, understanding their critical problems, and ranking them, we focus on generating strategies and related tactical plans. The strategies either address problems with our current processes or initiate moves in directions that will advance us strategically. We then develop tactical plans for each strategy and determine the milestones and resources that will be needed to complete each tactical plan. As an essential planning step, we identify performance measures to evaluate the success of our tactical plans. We also establish a process for reporting progress to ensure that the tactical plans stay focused and problems are identified and resolved at an early stage.

The business plan also includes our operating principles, which guide all Research Library staff in providing products and services to our customers. The following list summarizes those principles:

- Manage customer feedback
- Continuously improve customer satisfaction levels
- Monitor process data measurements
- Continuously improve performance of critical processes
- Develop and maintain up-to-date documentation for all processes
- Continuously develop staff skills and knowledge
- Share relevant knowledge with other staff
- Optimize utilization of organizational resources
- Develop partnerships with suppliers to maximize value
- Meet or exceed sponsor, compliance, and budget requirements for all processes

Research Library Challenges

Libraries face a number of challenges in today's environment of rapid change. Two major challenges for the Research Library are in the areas of resources (funding) and technological change.

1. Resource Issues

The Research Library is a support organization at the Laboratory whose funding comes from a Laboratory tax on all technical staff members. Like many libraries today, we are looking at flat or decreased funding and staffing at a time when we want to accomplish more and move forward quickly. Therefore, we must concentrate our expertise on what is of most importance to our customers and on those elements of our business plan that we can effectively control. We analyze process and customer data to determine whether to maintain, improve, or drop current products or services.

We cannot afford to provide new products that do not succeed in meeting customer needs. It is critical that we involve customers as partners in product planning and development so that we can concentrate on incorporating the technology that will add value to those products. Planning for future products also involves looking at external sources of information. We constantly evaluate market and business technology data to identify trends that may impact our future. Since many of the skills needed to provide tomorrow's products and services must be learned, continuous growth and learning are part of each staff member's job. As we move into the electronic arena, teams working on strategic projects must develop skills that combine customer focus, technological expertise, and research and development capabilities.

2. Technological Changes

The world of information technology and publishing continues to change rapidly. Our customers demand Web access to all of our databases. They expect to access databases, journal articles, and reports at their desktop. These demands have revolutionized our work processes over the past three years. We dedicate one full-time-equivalent employee to maintain our Library Web page (http://lib-www.lanl.gov), which is the central access point for all of our electronic databases, journals, and reports. We presently are receiving about 10% of our journal collection in electronic format. We have negotiated a unique contract with individual journal publishers to provide access to their journals. While some journal vendors are interested in providing journal files to us to mount locally, others expect us to access their journals at their sites using proprietary interfaces. Because this is a new area both for journal publishers and for us, we are partnering to learn about image quality and effective means of database access and to work on other problems arising in this new arena.

Our project to attach full-image journal articles to our on-line catalog and bibliographic database has provided a different set of technical challenges. We are using SICI journal numbers (a unique set of numbers for identifying journal articles) to connect the full-image articles to records in indexes such as the DOE Energy database and the SciSearch® at LANL database. Our customers have repeatedly stated that they want to access full-image articles at their desktop once they have identified bibliographic references to them.

Conclusion

Our integrated planning process is essential to maintain and improve present products and services while simultaneously planning for future directions at the LANL Research Library. Based on a strong strategic direction that is produced by our planning process, we will successfully manage the changing environment within both the Laboratory and the Library world to become an innovative, customer-focused library in the 21st century.