

SOLINET Scenarios

Members were asked to participate in the discussion via an email invitation. Those able to attend received a copy of all three scenarios prior to the meeting date. Scenarios were developed to depict libraries three to five years into the future, without reference to specific library types or sizes.

Discussion groups contained 10-20 people. The discussion was formally facilitated to obtain feedback through the following process:

1. Introduction of all participants, purpose of discussion, and context of scenario planning
2. Full group divided into three small groups, each to discuss a different scenario and answer the following questions:
 - a. What aspects of the scenario are likely for libraries in 3-5 years?
 - b. What aspects of the scenario are not likely in 3-5 years?
 - c. Is there anything important that is missing? (Are there likely changes in 3-5 years that are not represented in the scenario?)
3. Small groups reported out on their discussions.
4. Small groups reconvened and discussed "What can SOLINET do to help your libraries reach the desired future?"

Notes and flip charts were kept for each discussion, and the results of those were combined into a summary report. A link to the finished, web-based report was emailed to all individuals invited to participate in the discussions.

Scenario A: Moving to the Front of the House

This library is serving its community with energy and drive. Resources (staff, collections, and space) have been re-allocated to directly support service goals. Staff resources in particular focus on 'front-of-shop' operations, to ensure that the library remains as relevant to the information need of its community as possible. The library is re-evaluating and frequently outsourcing repetitive and routine processes that do not directly serve users. At the same time, collaborations with non-library organizations are increasing, to better meet a range of community needs within the context of the library (for example, academic libraries are collaborating with tutoring, advising, and technology services on campus to support students, and public libraries are collaborating with local government agencies and businesses to expand access to community services).

Collections are a mix of analog and digital resources. The book is still important to most users, and digitized materials available in paper format through such services as on-demand printing make up an increasingly large part of the library's acquisitions. The library is very conscious of the cost of storage for valuable but lesser-used library collections, and it has sought ways and means to store these materials in off-site facilities. Not only is this more cost effective, but off-site storage also frees up more space for user services.

Cost is a significant driver for the administration of the library and its governing agency. The need to justify plans and account for expenditures is paramount. While the library does prefer to have regular suppliers who understand their information and service need, cost is a primary factor in decision-making. To meet accountability expectations, the library relies on assessments of its performance relative to similar organizations. It also invests more resources into obtaining feedback from users and providing 'return on investment' reports to the community.

- Services are designed to meet assessed needs and be accountable to a defined community of users.
- Technology is used to support service to users and re-design of traditional library functions to reduce costs.
- Collections are developed to meet immediate needs of users, with reliance on interlibrary lending to supplement local resources.
- Buildings are community and service-oriented, although funds to renovate are limited.
- Staffs are skilled adapters of technology, with expertise in service management, assessment, and contracting.

Scenario B: The Lithe Physical and Digital Library

The library collection in 2010 has actually shrunk in physical size, but it delivers much more digital resource than it was ever able to deliver as a mixed-media library in previous years. The content of the digital media in the library includes a wide range of materials, from print through music, art, datasets, and interactive games. Some of the library digital collection is 'born digital' and some also exists in analog format. Increasingly, the library acts as the repository and venue for digital resources produced throughout its community. While many library users are never actually seen (they access the library from their home, office, classroom, etc.), ever larger groups of users still come to the physical library for collaborative work and study space, socializing, and community services. There is a 'wall-paper' collection of books, but the vast array of resources in the library are digital.

With limited financial buying-power, libraries have elected to adopt a strategy of digital delivery for the content they do not hold directly through subscriptions. This has resulted in the delivery of material in digital form that had been only available in print form previously. Wholesale retro-conversion of print resources into digital is still economically challenging for most libraries, but digital conversion is possible for material of immediate use and high value (such as unique, local, and special collections). Digitization and technology extend the library's resource reach beyond the region into national and international realms.

The library maintains a strong but flexible staffing arrangement and secures the skill experts it needs when it needs them. It does this so that it can offer the best services to a wide range of users, including an enthusiastic new group of Generation Y and younger users who have different styles of study and service expectations than other groups. With constantly evolving technology and user expectations, libraries invest significant resources in staying ahead of the curve. Although the library still has a strong sense of its physical presence, it is keenly aware that even more usage of its services and content occurs in homes and offices across its community. Users mix the content received from the library with the huge amount of 'free-to-air' resources they can access from the web. They are able to do this with a sharp appreciation of how to evaluate content from both sources because of education programs the library offers both in person and remotely.

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- Services are primarily digital, both to local and remote users.
 - Technology is the basis for provision of library services and access to library information resources and collections.
 - Collections are primarily electronic. Print and other analog formats are being converted to digital formats.
 - Buildings remain the physical anchor of the library. They serve local users as a community center and function as the physical base for the staff and technology resources that drive service to all users.
 - Staffs use forward-thinking technology skills to be community leaders in information technology.

Scenario C: The Collaborative, User-Driven Library

Library services are increasingly customized to meet individual characteristics of their users. Users have a stronger role than ever in the provision of library services, and are active participants in library operations, from design and delivery of information services to selection and organization of collection resources. The library collaborates with users in providing service. It also collaborates actively with other libraries through local, state, and regional networks and affinity groups, to meet the needs of various and different shared constituencies.

User and library collaboration is facilitated by the strong integration of library resources with common web-based search engines, such as Google and Yahoo. Users find library resources through these mechanisms rather than through a stand-alone library catalog. Through web-based search services, libraries are virtually joined together in a global catalog of resources.

As a consequence, library technical services have changed. Libraries acquire most new material pre-processed, so they don't need to invest internal staff resources in traditional cataloging. Cataloging that does occur at the library uses more basic metadata standards defined by international organizations, with the primary goal of ensuring discoverability of library resources through web search services. Librarians can easily source their in-house cataloging and interlibrary borrowing programs by directly searching the records of all libraries through Google or Yahoo. State and regional networks provide coordination among their libraries to facilitate lending programs. At the same time, "folksonomies" are increasingly created and managed by libraries and their users, as another means to customize services. This customization is also evident in collection acquisitions, as more resources are acquired through on-demand publishing and pay-per-view services at the specific request of users.

Library staff are sophisticated technologists, working with others in the community to develop and apply a variety of programs and tools to library services with a focus on those that enhance user collaboration and improve communication and information delivery. Many of these programs are open source. Working collaboratively with other libraries through networks and consortia supports the development of open source technology in libraries and ensures interoperability.

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- Services are primarily digital and users are very involved in their design and delivery; the library is a collaborator and facilitator in providing information services.
 - Technology is developed by the library to facilitate services to users; it is used to streamline internal processes and support collaboration among users and libraries.
 - Collections are primarily digital, more often leased than purchased, and selection and acquisition decisions are often driven directly by users.
 - Buildings support the library infrastructure and provide collaborative community workspace.
 - Staffs apply forward-thinking technology skills to library operations and to building collaboration and community among users.