TOMPKINS COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY

2006-2011

STRATEGIC TECHNOLOGY PLAN

Adopted March 29, 2006
TCPL Board of Trustees

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Executive Summary

Technology plays an essential role in enabling the library to meet its mission of connecting people with information.

A technology plan for our library must address library specific technology such as cataloging, acquisitions, and circulation systems. The plan must also deal with the generic office environment and contain plans for organizational operations such as word processing, payroll, and database development. Most importantly our technology plan must meet our users' needs.

This plan encompasses computing hardware and software for users and staff, and associated peripheral or specialized equipment such as self-check workstations and digital microfilm scanners. The plan also addresses policy questions involving access to information, privacy, security, staffing, training and marketing needs.

Through technology planning, our library's technology will remain up-to-date, reliable, resilient and flexible. Because changes in software and hardware can be expensive and often bring with it steep learning curves, a technology plan helps ensure that changes are planned and managed carefully, with the least amount of disruption necessary. Through solid technology planning, our library can achieve greater productivity, increased staff efficiency and improved service to both our staff and users.

As a beneficiary of the federal government's Universal Service Fund Program (e-rate), our library must have an up-to-date technology plan which guides our planning and investment. It must contain clear goals and a realistic strategy to achieve those goals. It must include an assessment of where we are today, where we plan to go, a budget to support those goals and an evaluation process which monitors progress.

More importantly, an up-to-date technology plan is critical for supporting technology funding requests. It is a practical tool for focusing limited resources on those objectives which are of the highest priority. A technology plan demonstrates that the library is both visionary and realistic.

The Technology Vision

Technology plays an essential role in enabling the library to meet its mission of connecting people with information. The library will maintain and upgrade existing technology following industry standards. The library will continuously survey the evolving technology landscape for appropriate applications and will prudently pilot promising new technology. Overall, the library aspires to be near the forefront of library technology practices.

Goal 1   Maintain existing technology so that it is sufficient, up-to-date, and meets patron and staff technology needs.

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This Technology Plan covers the period 2006 – 2011. It is realistic to expect that this plan will be modified, revised and changed as we encounter changing conditions during the next five years. The plan was developed by a team of library employees, library trustees, computer specialists and community members.

TCPL Technology Committee Members 2004-2005

David Weil, Chair
> TCPL Board of Trustee; Director--Web, Systems and Dept. Services, Ithaca College

Nathan Fawcett
> TCPL Board of Trustee; Special Assistant to the Provost for State-Related Issues, Cornell University

Oliver Habicht
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Janet Steiner
> TCPL Director

Charles Young
> Computer Support Services, Sherpa Technologies

Organizational Profile

The Tompkins County Public Library, (Ithaca, New York), founded in 1864 by Ezra Cornell, serves the 96,501 residents of Tompkins County and is the Central Library for the Finger Lakes Library System, serving libraries and users in Tompkins, Tioga, Cortland, Seneca and Cayuga counties. Our mission is to enhance the lives of all people in Tompkins County by connecting them to the world's wisdom, knowledge, and culture through free and open access to information and creative expression in many formats.

With over 40,000 registered borrowers, and an annual circulation approaching one million items, the Tompkins County Public Library (TCPL) is a vibrant and busy institution. The library offers a circulating collection of 240,000 items including books, paperbacks, magazines, videos, DVDs, music CDs, and recorded books. An extensive interlibrary loan service provides patrons with items that are not owned by TCPL. Reference and information services are available in person, by phone or by email. Access to comprehensive databases, the library's catalog, and the extensive resources on the World Wide Web are available through free public Internet workstations. Specialized services include: Elvis, a computer for low-vision patrons; microfilm scanners; and the Rosetta Stone, a language software program for learning English and other languages. Public programming for all ages includes author readings, story time, art shows, music, cultural celebrations and an annual Community Read in collaboration with Cornell University.

The library moved into its new facility in November of 2000. The move provided an opportunity to upgrade and increase its technological capabilities.

Why a Technology Plan?

The library's 2002-2006 Strategic Plan calls for an increase in the investment in technology as one of the eight recommendations for achieving our vision of being among the excellent public libraries for our scope and size in the nation. The plan calls for a standing Technology Committee of the Board of Trustees to assist the library in identifying future technological trends, and meeting current ones.

The first Technology Plan (2000 – 2005), written in preparation for the move to the new library in 2000, contained detailed specifications and costs for the computing infrastructure that would be in the new facility. Network architecture, applications for users and staff, Internet connectivity and hardware and software needs were identified along with cost estimates.

This Technology Plan covers the period 2006 – 2011. It is realistic to expect that this plan will be modified, revised and changed as we encounter changing conditions during the next five years.

Through technology planning, our library's technology will remain up-to-date, reliable, resilient and flexible. Because changes in software and hardware can be expensive and often bring with them steep learning curves, a technology plan helps ensure that changes are planned and managed carefully, with the least amount of disruption necessary. Through solid technology planning, our library can achieve greater productivity, increased staff efficiency and improved service to both our staff and users.

As a beneficiary of the federal government's Universal Service Fund Program (e-rate), our library must have an up-to-date technology plan which guides our planning and investment. It must contain clear goals and a realistic strategy to achieve those goals. It must include an assessment of where we are today and where we plan to go; a budget to support those goals; and an evaluation process which monitors progress. An up-to-date technology plan is also required to be eligible for federal Library Services and Technology Aids (LSTA) funds.

More importantly, an up-to-date technology plan is critical for supporting technology funding requests. It is a practical tool for focusing limited resources on those objectives which are of the highest priority. A technology plan demonstrates that the library is both visionary and realistic.

What is Technology?

This plan describes computing hardware and software for users and staff, and associated peripheral or specialized equipment such as self-check workstations and digital microfilm scanners. Other library equipment such as photocopiers, telephone systems and audio visual equipment is not included. The plan also addresses policy questions involving access to information, privacy, security, staffing, training and marketing needs.

Our Technology Vision

A technology plan for our library must address library specific technology such as cataloging, acquisitions and circulation systems. It must also deal with the generic office environment and contain plans for organizational operations such as word processing, payroll and data base development. Most importantly our technology plan must meet our users' needs.

A public library mirrors the community which it serves. Many library users are technologically sophisticated and expect the library to provide advanced technology applications.

Other users lag behind and need help in adapting to new technologies and in developing skills that will lead them to the information they seek.

Some members of the public do not understand why libraries need to offer more than books and magazines. Libraries must help their patrons discover how their searches for information and their ability to deal with a changing information environment can be made easier and more efficient with the help of new technologies. Patrons also need help understanding how valuable the guidance of professional librarians can be when they use these technologies.

The Technology Vision

Technology plays an essential role in enabling the library to meet its mission of connecting people with information. The library will maintain and upgrade existing technology following industry standards. The library will continuously survey the evolving technology landscape for appropriate applications; and will prudently pilot promising new technology. Overall, the library aspires to be near the forefront of library technology practices.

Trends in Library Technology

With the advent of OCLC (an international library computer consortium based in Ohio) in the 1970's, desktop computing in the 1980's and the Internet in the 1990's, library technology has dominated the attention of library professionals. Scarce library resources have by necessity been directed towards purchasing, installing and upgrading hardware and software. Information which was once only contained in printed books is now licensed, packaged and accessed via technology. Staff technology training has consumed the continuing education budgets while educating and training the library user has been challenging.

All of this activity is expected to continue over the next five years. Staff and user training, upgrading of hardware and software and the increasing availability of digitized information will require diligence in researching the options and in budgeting for the increased resources needed.

Trends in library technology appear to be underscoring the mission of the library as a democratic institution where the playing field is leveled for all citizens. Library Weblogs, for example, give everyone an opportunity to weigh in and be read. A library can collect, maintain

and make available, in electronic format, reader's comments about books and reading, student essays and book reports, thus fostering a community of readers.

Affordable portable devices such as laptops, PDAs, MP3 players and IPods will allow access to content (i.e., information, music, video, etc.) anytime and anywhere. Users will expect connectivity to be available everywhere and for everyone. Wireless technology changes the way we think about the information environment.

New technology is not only portable, it is personal. Software and hardware can be customized and personalized for each user. RSS, for example, aggregates rapidly changing dynamic information, allowing users access to the content from multiple sites without having to go to each one. At the same time instant community can be built using "social software:" people spontaneously sharing media, conversations, photos, etc. One has only to think of how cell phones have changed our social interactions to understand this trend.

While users will expect 24/7 access to everything (their friends, information, networks), security and privacy issues will continue to be concerns during the next five years. Confidentiality, patron privacy, integrity and accessibility of user information and computer resources are legal, social, and ethical issues going far beyond libraries.

Specific library technology trends include meta-searching, which, like RSS, allows patrons one-stop access to many digital resources and databases. Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology may change the way we manage our physical materials, but privacy issues will need to be resolved. Public library catalogs will be customizable for both the library and the users, with features which more closely resemble commercial Web sites. The library environment will need to respond to the younger generation's preferences: a place to meet friends, visually interesting, stimulating and contemplative, ergonomic, with cool things to explore.

Needs Analysis

Technology is a tool which allows us to better organize, access and maintain information. Through technology these functions become faster and better, with multiple features and applications.

A Staff Computer Needs Analysis was conducted in August of 2004. This comprehensive survey highlighted hardware and software needs, training needs, ergonomic issues, and other issues relating to employees' use of technology in their day to day jobs. Implementation of many of the findings began almost immediately. On-going assessments of staff's technology needs are conducted through the library's staff development and training program.

Users' needs are more difficult to assess. Requests from users from the past year were compiled by staff and reviewed by the committee, but no attempt was made to prioritize them. The committee relied on the staff's assessments of the perceived needs of users over the next five years, as well as a search of the library literature.

There is a growing awareness that generational differences among library users and their need for technology will require savvy staff who can move between seniors, others who have never used a mouse and gamers who have grown up playing video games--staff who can confidently assess the technology needs of each audience and who can serve and attract all.

Strategic Goals

While it might be enticing to have a technology plan with futuristic and ambitious goals, it is clear that maintaining what we already have is a higher priority. Of the eight strategic goals below, three address the maintaining, promoting and training of technology already in place. The fourth and fifth goals stretch our imagination and point to ways that technology can be used to help achieve our mission. Legal, ethical, financial and measurement goals complete the list.

At the time that this plan was developed, the library was functioning within extreme fiscal constraints. Given that reality, few of the objectives outline new technology products or services. The goals that we offer are those which are prudent and provide value at low or no cost. If our fiscal situation improves, we may be able to achieve our goals more rapidly and speed up innovation and experimentation. If our fiscal situation does not improve, it is possible that few of these goals will be achieved.

Goal 1
Maintain existing technology so that it is sufficient, up-to-date and meets patron and staff technology needs.

    a)   Maintain and implement adequate replacement and upgrade schedules for technology hardware and software as well as network components, operating systems and virus protection software.

    b)   Maintain up-to-date computer software licenses and maintenance agreements.

    c)   Establish protocols for security of library systems.

    d)   Establish a plan for disaster recovery.

    e)   Meet industry standards with regard to the number of staff assigned to computer support services.

     f)   Investigate the use of smart cards for printing, copying and paying fines.
     g)   Determine the level of demand for a media viewing/listening station.

Goal 2
Train staff and users in effective and productive uses of technology.
Staff

     a)   Include technology training needs in annual staff development needs assessments.
     b)   Take into account different learning styles and use various training methods and locations when training.

Users
     c)   Provide ongoing training in searching techniques and evaluation skills (information literacy) with regard to Web sites, Polaris, and other information sources.
     d)   Provide clear instructions for all equipment.
     e)   Design and implement special training programs to improve technically challenged patrons' understanding of what is available to them.
     f)   Increase users' awareness of safety and privacy issues on the Internet.

Goal 3
Promote the library's technological capabilities.

     a)   Obtain professional assistance in developing a public information and marketing campaign to promote the Library as a source of guidance for navigating "the sea of resources."
     b)   Implement the marketing plan.
     c)   Promote the technological capabilities of the library in library publicity, promotion and outreach efforts.

Goal 4
Investigate and pilot new library technology.

     a)   Identify best practices and peer benchmarks for library technology.
     b)   Monitor developments in the delivery of digital content, i.e., e-books, MP3, streaming video, etc.
     c)   Monitor developments in digital reference service, i.e., instant messaging, live chat, etc.
     d)   Explore ways to enhance the use of wireless technology.
     e)   Monitor developments with RFID (radio-frequency i.d.) and develop a cost-benefit analysis for incorporating this technology into library activities.

Goal 5
Use technology to foster communication between the library and community.

    a)   Increase Web site management from 14 hours to 35 hours per week.
    b)   Create moderated discussion lists, offering information about library services and programs.
    c)   Investigate the use of blogging software to serve library promotion and facilitate patron interaction and communication.
    d)   Investigate the creation of a digital repository for community discussions about books and reading.

Goal 6
Monitor legal and ethical issues involving technology.

    a)   Continue to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of library users.
    b)   Comply with ALA guidelines, and state and federal laws and regulations, while working to change those which conflict with the library's privacy policy.
    c)   Maintain a non-filtering environment for Internet users.

Goal 7
Secure Funding for Technology.

    a)   Provide sufficient funding for staff technology training.
    b)   Ensure that funding for technology is part of the definition of core library operational costs.
    c)   Use private support to pilot new technologies where appropriate.

Goal 8
Regularly assess progress, evaluate outcomes, and update the technology plan.

    a)   Evaluate technology hardware and software purchases for ease of use by the end-user before purchasing or implementing.
    b)   Ensure that the library board of trustees is well-informed about technology.
    c)   Retain the Technology Committee as a standing committee of the library board, with members to include trustees, staff and community.
    d)   Establish a library staff technology users group to discuss and resolve day-to-day practical technology issues.
    e)   Develop improved mechanisms for obtaining patron comments on technology software and hardware.
    f)   Ensure that all technology training includes outcome measures.

Technology Budget

The Technology Budget (Appendix D) contains estimates of what it will cost to achieve the goals set forth below. Many of the goals are investigative in nature. If, following the investigation, it is deemed appropriate to implement, further costs will be necessary.

A computer replacement schedule, Appendix E lists library equipment, computers and printers, estimated replacement costs and expected dates for replacements. Replacement costs are given in 2006 dollars and are not adjusted in future years. Desktop computers are on a four-year replacement cycle. Other computer related equipment is on a longer replacement cycle based on industry standards for life expectancy. Computer equipment for the TCPL Foundation is shown on the spreadsheet but replacements costs are the responsibility of the Foundation and are not included in the totals.

Technology Plan Cost Estimates

Goals/Replacements	One-time	Recurring
High Priority Goals	$ 6,470	$ 50,119
Medium Priority Goals	$ 564	$106,848
Low Priority Goals*	$ 2,371	
2006 Computer Hardware Replacements	$ 47,000	
2007 Computer Hardware Replacements	$ 102,400	
2008 Computer Hardware Replacements	$ 69,000	
2009 Computer Hardware Replacements	$ 100,890	
2010+ Computer Hardware Replacements	$ 73,500	

*Most low priority goals were removed from the final version of this plan in recognition of the unlikely possibility of receiving funding for them.

For a complete copy of the Technology Plan with Appendices contact the Library Director, Janet Steiner, 607.272.4557, ext 234; or jsteiner@tcpl.org.