

Introduction

Four years ago the NSLS Board and staff explored future options for NSLS using scenario planning techniques. We chose a future that focused on positioning NSLS as the technology hub for systems in Illinois and decided to develop revenue streams to supplement our state grant, using the Library Partnership Trust (LPT) and sponsorships. We have worked hard to achieve these goals and our success has brought us to more decision points.

- We've become a technology hub and at this point in time have a very strong and creative technology team that has been recruited to work on projects statewide. For example, through an ISL grant, we are working to develop a CE calendar for the entire state of Illinois. We also have agreements with two systems and the ISL to provide them with our e-newsletter technology. Both of these help position us as leaders in technology. However, they also bring with them the issues of support and maintenance. We do not have the staff to provide maintenance and support as well as to research and develop new technologies that will help us to maintain our leadership position with our members.
- The LPT has developed a revenue stream from consortia offers. The offers have been successful and in some cases have produced revenue. They are also very time consuming and require much staff time to manage the process, and work with vendors and participating libraries. Business models change and we can't rely on vendors to be our partners long term. Libraries are very cost conscious and we can't rely on them to stick with us either if the vendors offer them better pricing.

In addition to these challenges, we are facing a crossroads with most of our major programs and services.

- Our Delivery situation is overwhelming. Volume continues to increase, which means we must devote more and more staff time to this service. While we strongly support resource sharing between our libraries, we are reaching the point where we are running out of staff and financial resources to pursue other areas. It's time to rethink and retool.
- We also must address the future of Digital Past (DP). When we first began this project in 1998, we intended it to be a local history initiative. Now, ten years later, institutions all over the state (including major Chicago museums and cultural institutions) are expressing interest in joining DP. We are facing bandwidth issues and the need to explore other platforms besides CONTENTdm.

The FY 2008 – 2009 Work Plan is designed to address all of these challenges. The plan is also more focused on how these items can directly benefit our members. It is not exhaustive and does not include all of our regular activities. For example, although NSLS staffers consult with members on a daily basis, consulting is not included as a specific item in this plan. We also offer a number of Advocacy events and programs designed to garner political support for libraries. These ongoing activities are not included in this plan.

For other areas such as Professional Development and Delivery, we've included only major, new initiatives. (For example, we want to explore online learning methods.) We will still maintain our current high standard of service in the day-to-day operations of these services.

In summary, the items in this plan are designed to address the following issues. Faced with ever dwindling financial resources and limited personnel, how can NSLS:

- Maintain our current level of high quality service to our members?
- Stay on the cutting edge and continue to pursue initiatives that will help us to offer the most up-to-date and effective service to our members?
- Keep our members informed about new technology and other developments that will help them prove their value to their communities and help lead them into the future?
- Find the proper balance between cooperating with other library systems (especially in the technology area) and leaving enough time to work on projects of importance to NSLS and our members?

Work Plan Items

Professional Development

- Introduce concept of Informal Learning and explore online methods of PD Delivery. Example: Create modules/tutorials to load on the NSLS website to orient members to different NSLS projects and services. This might include such things as CoPs, networking groups, LPT services, advocacy, and Trustee training.

Benefit to members: Many of the people who work at our libraries are finding it more and more difficult to attend training sessions at NSLS for various reasons. They want to take training at the time and place most convenient to them. Since our CoPs and networking groups are so popular with members, they could make excellent PD delivery methods.

Benefit to NSLS: Offering online methods of PD Delivery for new projects and services would help library staff to become familiar with NSLS services such as CoPs, networking groups, etc. Staff time may be saved by cutting down on consulting telephone calls and emails asking questions that would be answered by these online infomercials.

NSLS website and e-newsletter

- Redesign NSLS website and e-newsletter based on March 2008 member survey comments and new technological developments that will help make these tools more effective.

Benefit to members: We want to stay up-to-date with new technologies and model these developments for our libraries. Members have also told us that they would like our website to be more interactive and they want to be able to customize information.

Benefit to NSLS: NSLS wants its members to know that we listen to them. Offering new technology tools shows that we are innovative and introduces new forms of delivering services for library staff to explore.

Delivery

- Explore and determine future direction of Delivery Service. How can we continue to provide high quality service to our members and deal with issues such as, ever-increasing volume, space, overtime, etc.?

Benefit to members: Delivery is one of the most important services we offer to our public libraries and it is also our most expensive service. In order to continue to offer quality service, we must find a way to control ever rising costs and address workload issues.

Benefit to NSLS: NSLS continually looks for new methods of delivery. Using larger capacity vehicles and realigning routes may save valuable resources and help this service operate more efficiently.

Library Partnership Trust (LPT)

- Determine future direction of LPT and consortia offers

Benefit to members: Because we are able to aggregate the purchasing power of libraries throughout the state, LPT offers can save libraries a great deal of money and staff time. We can also bring products to our members that they otherwise may not have noticed.

Benefit to NSLS: Working with the LPT allows NSLS to explore additional innovative projects and services in new ways. Administering the consortia offers helps staff learn to manage internal processes more efficiently which will benefit NSLS.

Infrastructure

- Position NSLS for the “next step” by using technologies to work smarter, not harder. Explore new technology options such as "cloud computing" to reduce the infrastructure overhead and free up time for R&D. Other strategies will include: continue to keep staff running on current, state-of-the-art desktops; consolidate and replace older servers; move staff to higher level, online productivity tools; and establish a set of core competencies for staff.

Benefit to members: One of the main things that members look to NSLS to provide is leadership – especially in the area of technology. Having a well-trained staff that is up-to-date on the latest technology and operating efficiently and effectively will help us provide even better service to our members.

Benefit to NSLS: Providing new technology will assist staff to work more efficiently. Freeing up our valuable staff time will help them to pursue new initiatives.

Digital Past

- Determine future direction of Digital Past to best take advantage of growing number of participants and records. Redesign site as appropriate.

Benefit to members: Digital Past is becoming more and more popular with our members and other outside institutions as well. It is no longer simply the local area digitization initiative it was in the beginning. We also need to explore new models to keep up with new technology and to address bandwidth issues.

Benefit to NSLS: Digital Past will continue to grow and increase the depth of its collection. Operating Digital Past with the latest technology will show that NSLS is in the forefront for the digitization of valuable historical records.

Podcasting

- Further develop podcast program as a way of keeping members up-to-date about current issues at a time and place that is convenient to them.

Benefit to members: Podcasts offer our members a way to keep up with important library issues while commuting to work or any time or place where they have access to an MP3 player. They also offer a good way to publicize libraries in general to the outside world. Our podcast is downloaded an average of 750 times a month and this number keeps growing.

Benefit to NSLS: NSLS continues to explore new methods of marketing libraries. Quality podcasts will position NSLS as an innovative leader of information delivery.

Sponsorships and Partnerships

- Determine future direction of sponsorship program and continue to develop partnerships with organizations that will help us accomplish our goals.

Benefit to members: Sponsorships and partnerships help us to keep any program costs for our member libraries low. They also allow us to pursue new services that will help lead our members into the future. In addition, we want to model a new way of generating revenue to our members, since many of them are facing financial constraints as well.

Benefit to NSLS: Developing relationships with vendors will help NSLS to fund new programs and services for the benefit of our members.