Clinic: Annual Work Plans in the Public Library

Fall 2012
Introduction (from Promotional material):

On-going communication about work priorities with library staff and the board should happen throughout the year. The annual work plan is a tool a CEO can use to communicate the focus of staff work and to track progress on priorities and projects. It is also a tool which can be used for performance evaluations. The most effective performance evaluations are centered on the agreed-upon priorities jointly established by the board and the CEO. To stay focused on priorities, related activities are written into an annual work plan with measurable objectives. It can contain objectives pertaining to job performance or to projects, and it can contain a list of tasks which should be completed each month.

This clinic will primarily be a discussion on both the value and the development of such work plans. While we will have some sample work plans, it would be helpful to bring any work plans or similar documents which you might presently be using to track tasks, priorities or manage multiple projects.
Exercise #1 - To begin

With respect to your own library, what did you achieve last year? In other words, what did you think you were going to do? Did it happen? How did you make that happen?

Let’s share some points.

By definition…what is a work plan?

A work plan is written to plan the activities for a given period of time. It then becomes the guiding document for the activities to be carried out during that time period.

The purposes of a work plan...

• **Planning for a period of time** - The main purpose is to have a planning and management instrument (or tool) which provides a method for planning the work, and a guide, during the period in question for carrying out the work. An example of this would be to complete or expand the work from the library’s strategic plan.

• **Connecting performance evaluation** – The work plan could also be given to those in the organization who have a need or a right to know what you are doing, and why, during the current period. An example of this would be to guide the performance evaluation of the CEO for the period or the performance evaluation of individual staff members.

• **Project tracking** - A work plan could also be used by funding agencies as a document for organizing a specific project or program which has specific phases. While project-based work plans include some of the same elements as an annual work plan (for example, times for completion and a list of objectives or goals), they often have a slightly different format, as they divide the overall project into a logical sequence of steps and provide a budget. So, the project-based work plan would include an introduction, which explains the challenge/goal of the project; a list of objectives/goals, which show what is to be accomplished; a record of constraints/resources, which show what can be used; a section showing actions/strategy, which explains how things are to be accomplished and appendixes that include such things as the schedule and budget. This third purpose is not part of this clinic today.
And for the record... what a work plan is NOT

In Guidelines for preparing a work plan prepared for the Community Empowerment Collective in Vancouver, the author, Phil Bartle is very clear about what a work plan is NOT -

“From the beginning, it is important to get rid of two assumptions about work plans: (a) that a work plan consists only of a budget, and (b) that a work plan consists only of a schedule. ..

Many funding agencies and many executing agencies require a work plan in order to justify the release of funds for the period in question. Because of this, many managers incorrectly assume that the budget is the centre (or only) element of the work plan. Far from it.

The second incorrect assumption is that a schedule is a work plan. A coordinator may struggle to prepare a schedule, listing the tasks to be done, day by day, for the period in question. While a schedule is useful, of course, it is not a work plan (ie, it does not state what objectives and outputs are to be achieved, or how, or why). Furthermore, although a schedule can be a desired list of day by day activities, in the real world such precise lists cannot be followed. Other urgent tasks come up, unexpected visitors may show up, planned meetings may have to be rescheduled as the other parties may have unexpected tasks or visitors, and on and on. Rather than a rigid schedule, this document recommends that each of the outputs or objectives have a time period within which the completion date may be expected, which is an organic and flexible approach rather than the mechanical approach to preparing a schedule.

Once these two incorrect assumptions are discarded, then it is possible to go on and prepare a genuine work plan.”

The work flow of an annual work plan

If a library has a strategic plan, then the work of the Library CEO, and indeed of any staff, follows from the strategic priorities/directions included in that strategic plan document.

- The Library CEO will have a list of tasks or actions which need to be completed and will know which ones are to be completed by him/her and which ones are assigned to the Board or the Friends groups.
- The Library CEO may not actually complete each specific task themself, but will be responsible overall, and be the one to assign specific tasks to a particular staff member.

If a library does not have a formal strategic plan, you need to develop a work plan and you may be able to propose an annual work plan to the board. The Library CEO would have a list of tasks within the annual work plan – and the successful completion of each of the tasks would help to determine whether the CEO has performed as expected, at least has performed the tasks which were expected of him/her during that calendar year.
Creating a Work plan

Does the library have a strategic plan?

Yes

Create an annual work plan for the CEO from priorities within the strategic plan

Create work plans for individual staff based on division of work

Use work plan to frame performance review

No

Create an annual work plan based on discussions between board/CEO

Does the library have a special project?

Yes

Create work plan for the CEO from the tasks required to complete project

Use work plan to frame performance review

No

Create work plans for individual staff based on division of work

Use work plan to frame performance review
**Exercise #2 – The plan and the words**

If you have ever looked at a variety of library strategic plans, you will know that there are many different styles and formats and each seems to use different words to mean the same thing.

We have provided a sample from the Kitchener Public Library. Note that this plan is also posted on the web at [http://www.kpl.org/_docs/strategic_plan/Strategic_Plan_2009_2012.pdf](http://www.kpl.org/_docs/strategic_plan/Strategic_Plan_2009_2012.pdf)

The KPL plan uses the terms: Key Strategic Priorities and then Goals and then provides an unnamed list of things which will be done. Others use Strategic Directions, then Goals and then Actions. Some use Goals and Objectives and then Tasks. Don’t get too hung up on the terms, just realize that the plan needs to move from the general to the more specific, and that the work plan will have specific “things to do” over the course of the year to achieve the general priorities or directions.

While Kitchener has a large library system for its population of over 200,000, the plan still represents a library system. Read through the plan. What are one or two elements from the KPL plan which you would identify as being possible item which would be the direct responsibility of the CEO?

*Keep them in mind as we will be using these elements in our clinic today.*

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**Exercise #3 – The work in your library**

Can you list three things that you should be tracking on your own annual work plan? Why?
The work plan as a performance evaluation tool

The HR Council for the Nonprofit Sector, based in Ottawa, is an organization working in the area of human resources related to nonprofit organizations. One of the projects of the HR Council is the creation of “HR Management Standards. The HR Management Standards are designed to support the development and implementation of effective HR policies and practices. Under the section “Managing People and their Work”, there is an introduction and six standards. The web address is http://hrcouncil.ca/home.cfm.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Managing People and their Work</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A fundamental of good management is that all employees know what to do, how well they are performing and what they need to learn in order to do a better job. Setting clear performance targets and expectations, ensuring employees get objective feedback on their performance and have a personal development plan, will drive more effective individual behaviour and enhance organization performance.</td>
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<td>Building workplace relationships supports commitment by staff to the organization and to their work. These Standards will help to build a work environment that encourages individual excellence and satisfaction balanced with the needs of the organization.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Standard 3.1 - All new employees are oriented to the position and to the organization.</td>
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<td>Standard 3.2 - Managers and supervisors with the responsibility for managing the efforts of others are provided with appropriate learning opportunities to develop their supervisory skills.</td>
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<td><strong>Standard 3.3 - All employees have a work plan and performance objectives that identify the tasks/activities and expected results for future performance.</strong></td>
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<td>Standard 3.4 - The performance of each employee is fairly assessed, at least annually, at the end of the work plan or performance period.</td>
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<td>Standard 3.5 - The organization has methods to address employee performance issues or concerns.</td>
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<td>Standard 3.6 - The organization provides competitive compensation to employees.</td>
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</table>

Standard 3.3 suggests that all employees need to have a work plan. The details of this standard are listed here.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard Details</th>
<th>Implementation Considerations</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The work plan or performance objectives (usually annual) reflect the organization’s strategic direction, business plans, and/or annual plans.</td>
<td>Creating work plans/performance objectives is a joint responsibility of both the employee and his/her supervisor. Supervisors have final approval to ensure work plans/performance objectives are integrated across the organization and support the overall goals of the organization.</td>
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<td>The work plan/performance objectives are written documents jointly prepared by the employee and their supervisor.</td>
<td>Work plans/performance objectives can include individual development activities that support the organization’s goals.</td>
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<td>The supervisor needs to ensure that the work plan is achievable given the time assigned to the position and the skills of the individual.</td>
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Developing the work plan

Decide on the length of time to be covered by the work plan. One year is most common as it matches the time between performance evaluations.

- Begin by thinking backwards, started with where you want to be at the end of the period, and then figure out the steps needed to get there from where you are now. It is helpful to review the links between your job description, what you think might be included in the work plan and the organization’s goals, objectives and strategic plan.

- Start to write. It is suggested that you include a background piece which would include the relevant problems or issues that should be addressed during the period. The background should not be a long analysis or history but provide only the issues that justify the choice of objectives for the period of time in question.

- Develop a work plan that outlines the tasks or deliverables to be completed, expected results and measures or standards that will be used to evaluate performance.

**Good Practice**

Often the most difficult part of the planning phase is finding appropriate and clear language to describe the tasks, performance objectives and measures or indicators of success. In this approach, the objectives and indicators are subject to the “SMART” approach, in that they are:

- **Specific** - Specify clearly what is to be done, when it is to be done, who is to accomplish it and how much is to be accomplished.

- **Measurable** - Ask questions such as: How much? How many? How will I know when it is accomplished? Multiple measures should be used if possible, for example, quantity, quality, time frame and cost.

- **Attainable** - Assure there is reasonable path to achievement and feasible odds that you will get there.

- **Realistic** - The objective needs should match the level of complexity with the employee’s experience and capability and no insurmountable forces outside the control of the employee should hinder its accomplishment.

- **Time-bound** - Be clear about the time frame in which performance objectives are to be achieved. In most cases, objectives are to be completed by the end of the performance review period.

**Writing SMART objectives:** Action verb + Object of the action verb + Measures

Example: For an employee who is responsible for supervising volunteers at a drop-in centre for youth.

SMART Objective 1: Conduct monitoring visits to the drop-in centre on a monthly basis to assess the performance of the five volunteers against the plans and objectives that were developed with them.

SMART Objective 2: Provide written updates on the work of the volunteers to the Program Manager on a quarterly basis.

Not SMART: Visit the drop-in centre and see how the volunteers are doing
Timeline-based work plans

A timeline-based work plan is set up with a start and completion date for each individual job. The timeline based work plan might look something like this:

![Timeline-based work plan example]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description/Steps</th>
<th>Deadline</th>
<th>Apr</th>
<th>May</th>
<th>Jun</th>
<th>Jul</th>
<th>Aug</th>
<th>Sep</th>
<th>Oct</th>
<th>Nov</th>
<th>Dec</th>
<th>Jan</th>
<th>Feb</th>
<th>Mar</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Libraries will have equitable access to worldwide library collections and e-resources: Maintain collection of links in Circleshare - Adaptive Technology, Board Development, Networking, Training for Library Staff</td>
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<td>ongoing throughout the year</td>
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<td>2 Libraries will provide services according to minimum standards: Conduct pre audits: x library y library z library Trillium Policy Manual review and updates</td>
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Exercise #4 – Practice

Using the SMART objectives, take one of the three areas you identified in Exercise #2 or #3, and try writing a task/objective to be included in your work plan.

The work plan has been created...what happens now?

Monitor

For a work plan to be effective, progress and performance must be continuously monitored. Monitoring day-to-day performance does not mean watching over every aspect of how a person carries out assigned activities and tasks. Managers should not micro-manage employees, but rather focus their attention on results achieved, as well as individual behaviors and team dynamics affecting the work environment.

During this phase, the CEO and board (or supervisor, depending on level) should meet regularly to:
- Assess progress towards meeting performance objectives
- Identify any barriers that may prevent the employee from accomplishing performance objectives and what needs to be done to overcome them
- Share feedback on progress relative to the goals
- Identify any changes that may be required to the work plan as a result of a shift in organization priorities or if the employee is required to take on new responsibilities
- Determine if any extra support is required from the manager or others to assist the employee in achieving his or her objectives

Review
The performance assessment or evaluation meeting is an opportunity to review, summarize and highlight the employee’s performance over the course of the review period. In the performance assessment meeting, employees and managers will:

- Summarize the work accomplished during the previous year relative to the goals that were set at the beginning of the performance period. This includes capturing the key results, accomplishments and shortfalls for each of the objectives.
- Document challenges encountered during the year and identify areas for training and/or development.
- Identify and discuss any unforeseen barriers to the achievement of the objectives.

**Resources:**
