

Challenges of Implementing the SLLA Strategic Plan: 2016-2022

Upali Amarasiri, Convener/SPSDC (2014-2016)

(Presentation at the SLLA Seminar on Implementation of the SLLA Strategic Plan: 08.02.2017 at the OPA Auditorium)

1. Background:

The Strategic Planning and Strategic Directions Committee (SPSDC) was appointed by the SLLA Council in 2014 to formulate a Strategic Plan for the association. In this endeavor the SPSDC conducted a SWOT analysis, carried out an opinion survey, studied the guidelines issued by IFLA on the subject, perused strategic plans of a number of other Library Associations (LAs), studied best practices of leading LAs, received sub-committee reports on a number of special areas of the plan, studied the relevant professional literature and conducted brainstorming sessions. These measures were carried out in addition to the formal meetings of the SPSDC. In January 2016 SPSDC presented the SLLA Strategic Plan 2016-2022 to the SLLA President. The plan was submitted to the SLLA Council by the President and the Council invited all SLLA members to study the plan and forward their views. After considering the views expressed by the members, SPSDC further improved the plan. Thereafter the SLLA Strategic Plan 2016-2022 was formally approved by the SLLA Council and later submitted to the SLLA Annual General Meeting in June 2016 where it was unanimously adopted. **Through the adoption of the Strategic Plan and the accompanied resolution, the SLLA AGM and the general membership authorized and delegated the SLLA Councils from 2016 to 2022, the responsibility of implementing the Strategic Plan. The Councils of 2016/2017 and 2017/18 have been entrusted the special responsibility of implementing the plan during the first two year period and further improve the plan at the end of the two year trial period. The Council, Professional groups and Special committees should have a clear understanding on this chain of events and the responsibilities entrusted upon them in relation to the implementation of the Strategic Plan.** It is encouraging to note that the present Council has appointed the COMAISP for assisting and monitoring the implementation and a number of special committees to deal with some important areas of the project. Hope that the professional groups, the major players in implementation will also join the exercise with enthusiasm without further delay.

2. Why is the Strategic Plan important to the SLLA?

- 2.1 SLLA members and other critics have been complaining on the rather restricted scope and limited achievements of the SLLA and have been clamouring to have a more dynamic and effective professional forum to deal with the plethora of challenges in the LIS field in Sri Lanka
- 2.2 Strategic planning is a time tested mechanism to improve the effectiveness and success of an organization

- 2.3 IFLA has repeatedly stressed the importance of formulating Strategic Plans by Library Associations to enable them to act effectively and competently
- 2.4 Most leading Library Associations in the world have been conducting their affairs through well formulated Strategic Plans in the last few decades and it is pointed out that one major reason for their phenomenal success is strategic planning and effective implementation
- 2.5 Following a well formulated Strategic Plan is the only way of improving the SLLA and making it a quality, effective, modern and member friendly professional association

3. Notable Features of the SLLA Strategic Plan

- 3.1 The SLLA Strategic Plan has been formulated after wide consultation, following the standard procedure by a group of experienced senior professionals. Though it may not be a perfect one, it has been hailed as a progressive document of high quality. The plan itself provides opportunities for improvements and rectification of the plan during the initial two year period.
- 3.2 It is a user friendly document which is easy to understand and comprehend
- 3.3 Identification of 8 key action areas with goals and strategies and through them tackling major challenges of the association and the LIS field in Sri Lanka
- 3.4 Well thought out 'Action plan and Performance measurements'
- 3.5 Identifying the specific needs of major LIS sectors in Sri Lanka (Appendix 1)
- 3.6 Listing the best practices of leading Library Associations (Appendix 2) and through that educating members on the potential of our own association
- 3.7 Flexibility of implementation during the first 2 year period (Heuristic Method) and providing opportunities to further improve the plan
- 3.8 Clearly identifying the responsibility of implementation of the plan (mechanism of Implementation): who does what, when, how, etc.
- 3.9 Allocation of funds for implementation

4. Selecting Project from the Strategic Plan (SP)

- 4.1 The SLLA Council, Professional groups and the Special committees have been entrusted with the responsibility of implementation of the SP through a series of projects during the 6 year period
- 4.2 Selecting appropriate projects at appropriate times (especially during the initial two year period) is important for the success of the implementation
- 4.3 Study the whole Strategic Plan carefully and be familiar with it
- 4.4 Examine the specific needs and strategic directions of your LIS sector through Appendix 1
- 4.5 Consult of the group/committee and senior experienced members of the sector for advise

- 4.6 Identify priorities and specific area/s that you and your group/committee want to improve
- 4.7 Study the goals and strategies of the selected Key Action Area in the SP and identify the strategy related to your identified project
- 4.8 Study the relevant area of the 'Action Plan and Performance measurements' and identify the action/s to be performed in order to implement the strategy
- 4.9 Understand the 'Performance measurement indicators' of the project and work towards achieving them

5. Other Considerations in Selecting a Project

- 5.1 It is advisable to select simple, uncomplicated and easily manageable project/s during the initial period
- 5.2 Initial successes will give the groups, committees the necessary confidence and experience in implanting more sophisticated projects later
- 5.3 Considering the late start (already we are in the second half of the SLLA academic year), it is advisable to select the projects appropriately
- 5.4 Understand the expertise and strength of the membership of your group and try to select a project accordingly. If necessary strengthen group by inviting a few other members to the group who can assist in the project
- 5.5 The conveners of the special committees should select other members of the committee taking into consideration their ability to contribute to the project
- 5.6 Plan to complete the entire project or a substantial part of thereof on or before mid May 2017 enabling the Council to report on the progress to the SLLA 2017 AGM
- 5.7 The project outcome should be of reasonably high quality to justify the effort

6. Preparation of the Budget

- 6.1 On the recommendation of the SPSDC, the SLLA AGM has approved a substantial amount of funds (Rs2 million) for implementation of the plan
- 6.2 It is our responsibility to use the funds cautiously and prudently
- 6.3 As members of SLLA we must provide honorary and voluntary services for the project as much as practicable or feasible
- 6.4 When seeking the external professional input, follow the accepted administrative and financial procedures and select the service providers accordingly
- 6.5 Fund management should be done professionally and cautiously according to the standard administrative and financial guidelines as this can easily tarnish the good name of the association and the people involved, if handled unprofessionally
- 6.6 Unnecessary fear or nervousness in handling funds too should not be entertained since it is one of the biggest obstacles in successfully completing projects

6.7 Always have experienced people in your group/committee and consult COMAISP for necessary guidance

7. Possible Obstacles

7.1 Lack of commitment and enthusiasm towards the project

7.2 Insufficient knowledge and understanding of the Strategic Plan

7.3 Professional groups or special committees not taking their role seriously in implementation of the project

7.4 Lack of the necessary balance in the groups and committees

7.5 Council, groups and committees inability in tapping the available resources from the SLLA membership

7.6 Lack of experience and knowledge in project management

7.7 Struggling with too large or complicated projects

7.8 Lack of guidance or not adequately using the problem solving mechanism

7.9 Fear of failure

8. Don't Miss the Historic Opportunity

8.1 In the 57 year history of SLLA this is the first time a Strategic Plan has been formulated which was unanimously approved by the SLLA Council and the SLLA AGM

8.2 Implementing the Strategic Plan should be a high priority for the SLLA Councils during the coming six year period (2016-22)

8.3 The responsibility of implementing selected areas of the plan and give the project an auspicious start is the historic responsibility of the 2016/17 and 2017/18 SLLA Councils

8.4 It is a rare and unusual opportunity and a honour for the present Council, groups and committees to get involve in the task

8.5 It is your duty to give the best shot to the project and justify the faith of the SLLA AGM and the entire membership bestowed on you. We must understand that no one else will do this for us and we will have to accomplish it by ourselves.

8.6 In the future, this period (2016-22) will be viewed as the era of the SLLA's 1st Strategic Plan. LIS professionals, LIS students and other researchers will examine the reasons for the success or for the failure of the plan, depending on the final outcome. Thus how you all handle the responsibility has a great significance in many ways

8.7 If you fail here, naturally you will be held responsible for 'missing the historic opportunity'. If you succeed, you will be hailed, appreciated and respected by the present and future generations of library and information professionals, in addition to the enormous self- satisfaction derived from the exercise.

Thank you and wish you all success in this historic endeavour.

'Without strategy, execution is aimless, without execution strategy is useless (Morris Chang)'