Building Towards the Future: Turning Challenges into Opportunities

Whether you serve as a director, department head, supervisor, librarian, or other personnel you will inevitably face challenges that impact your responsibilities and daily tasks. With every new technology or acquisition, with changes to outdated workflows and policies, as colleagues retire or make career changes, and even as societal and environmental changes impact your institution in unexpected ways, challenges can be turned into opportunities that benefit you, your department, and your institution. The Building Toward the Future Taskforce, a subgroup of NELLCO’s Acquisition and Collection Development Interest Group, have compiled some common challenges, potential opportunities, and benefits to help readers make the most of common challenges.

Challenge 1: With the loss of institutional staff because of retirements, career changes, and/or downsizing, job descriptions and duties have changed significantly.

- **Opportunity to:**
  - Consider original job descriptions and document how the job duties and responsibilities have evolved over time.
  - Develop processes to track new duties to determine how much time they take from overall responsibilities.
  - Review and trim redundant job duties or redistribute essential duties.

- **Benefits:**
  - Information gathered from assessing job duties can be utilized during internal reviews, added to growing curriculum vitaes, and used as leverage to negotiate promotions.
  - This process can lead to the identification of gaps in existing knowledge, providing opportunities to seek professional development to enhance skill sets.

Challenge 2: Changes in technology cause department workflows, processes, and standards to become outdated or obsolete.

- **Opportunity to:**
  - Review all workflows, processes, and standards applied to work and/or the department.
  - Identify problems and gaps, provide space for discussion, and make necessary revisions.
  - Document new technology and get input from personnel on their actual use of technology.

- **Benefits:**
  - Institutional introspection and correcting historical limitations.
  - Provides time to ask questions and gather institutional knowledge from
seasoned colleagues.
○ Encourages interdepartmental communication.

Challenge 3: Job duties and/or department(s) feel siloed.

- **Opportunity to:**
  ○ Consider personnel's job duties, responsibilities, and workflows as well as the role of the department within the organization, to identify opportunities for cross-training and collaboration.
  ○ Consider needs that are not being met in the larger organization and identify organizational "pain points" that your department may be able to assist with or offer a solution.

- **Benefits:**
  ○ Identify opportunities for cross-training and collaboration within the department.
    ■ Professional development and skills building.
    ■ Provides time to evaluate workloads and increase/decrease levels of responsibility.
    ■ Brainstorming often leads to new ideas and new projects.
  ○ Assist with “pain points” within the larger organization.
    ■ Interdepartmental collaboration.
    ■ Facilitates relationship building across the organization.
    ■ Supports good will for the library throughout the organization.

Challenge 4: The department and its services feel stagnant.

- **Opportunity to:**
  ○ Consider the services your department provides and whether those services are being satisfactorily fulfilled.
  ○ Consider including questions pertaining to your services to get feedback on your successes and limitations if your library conducts annual, internal, or stakeholder surveys.
  ○ Consider the structure of the department as a whole and determine if it applies to the new reality and service needs of today.

- **Benefits:**
  ○ Surveys or internal assessments
    ■ Identifies gaps and limitations in the services you provide.
    ■ Provides support for the services that are successful.
  ○ Considering the department as a whole.
    ■ Develop beyond historically "silod" structure.
    ■ Facilitates re-positioning of resources where they are most needed.
    ■ Supports new opportunities and skills development for staff members.

Challenge 5: Budgetary and administrative changes have limited personnel size and impacted departmental structure.

- **Opportunity to:**
  ○ Evaluate existing job descriptions, duties, and responsibilities to identify whether they apply to the library/department’s vision, mission, and goals.
• Identify additional areas where efficiency can be improved.

**Benefits:**
- Make substantial changes to a position including structural level and pay.
- Development of new skills to enhance professional development and career goals of personnel.
- Improvements that benefit the services of the department and/or library.

**Challenge 6:** The loss of institutional staff because of retirements and career changes causes the loss of institutional knowledge and task specific workflows.

• **Opportunity to:**
  - Document all workflows, work duties, projects, and collaborations.
  - Identify and correct historical limitations and/or obsolescence of workflows and job duties.

• **Benefits:**
  - Provides information necessary for new hires, colleagues, leadership, and other stakeholders to train, educate, and evaluate as it pertains to their own work.
  - Supports personnel in sharing their own work for training, and in academic scholarship, presentations, and other professional development opportunities.
  - Standardizes knowledge, facilitates cross-training.

**Challenge 7:** Budgetary limitations have led to limited opportunities for professional development and participation in conferences.

• **Opportunity to:**
  - Participate in local or national committees or other working groups.
  - Identify low-cost and free alternatives to traditional, expensive, national professional development opportunities (e.g., local, virtual, non-profit, government).
  - Apply for grants often offered in relation to specific conferences and other activities.

• **Benefits:**
  - Participate in local or national committees/working groups.
    - Learn what others are doing to address an issue or challenge.
    - Provides members the space to share their own experiences (or those of their department and/or library) addressing an issue or challenge.
    - Fosters relationships and creates good public relations for the library.
  - Low-cost and free alternatives.
    - For virtual opportunities, often slides, recordings, and other resources are provided which can then be shared within your department/library (with proper permissions).
  - Apply for grants.
    - General savings on fees and/or travel expenses.

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Challenge 8: Staff members are working from home or have flexible work schedules that interrupt in-person activities.

- **Opportunity to:**
  - Identify which tasks best lend themselves to remote work (e.g., scanning documents rather than delivering them in person).
  - Identify which services are truly essential to do in-person.
  - Provide equitable options for staff members that support and accept their individual needs.

- **Benefits:**
  - Improved mental health and work-life balance.
  - Improved recruiting and hiring of staff who may prioritize and/or value this benefit.
  - Time and cost savings for staff who would otherwise have to commute to work and/or pay for expensive and/or limited parking.
  - Broadened pool of applicants when hiring.
  - Improved work culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion.
  - Increased opportunity, productivity, and performance.

**Additional resources:**

This document is based on the following original presentation and takeaway document: