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# Planning and Evaluating Library Services

## Reflecting on Real Practices

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**ABSTRACT** This session shared data from a qualitative project studying how directors of small theological libraries engage in planning and evaluation and summarized the study's findings along six themes. The second half of the session provided the opportunity for attendees to discuss their experiences in planning and evaluation.

To explore how directors of theological libraries go about planning and evaluation, the researcher received planning documents and interviewed six directors of theological libraries via Zoom. Research questions included: (1) what processes do directors use for goal setting? (2) what institutional support for planning do directors receive? (3) what role do outside standards play? (4) what would help directors improve their processes for planning and evaluation? Participants all worked in small libraries with fewer than six professional librarians.

In the first half of the session, the researcher summarized findings. Based on analysis of interview transcripts, six themes emerged:

- First, half of those interviewed made an initial diagnosis of their library setting when they became the director and relied on that analysis to guide planning.
- Second, participants stressed that planning should be realistic. They focused on a small set of goals that could be achieved in a short period of time (often, one year).
- Third, external standards (specifically, those of the Association of Theological Schools, regional accrediting agencies, and the Association of College and Research Libraries) were important. For some, these standards provided firm guidelines with which to comply. For others, external standards represented best practices to aspire to.

- Fourth, participants reported that they generally felt supported in planning and evaluation by their supervisors. Only one reported that library planning was highly integrated into the school's institutional planning process.
- Fifth, participants reported that their main conversation partners were other librarians, as opposed to other administrators in their setting.
- Finally, participants reported that to improve their practices they needed more time or more staff. Some noted that standard planning tools do not seem to fit smaller schools with few professional library staff.

In the second half of the session, attendees shared examples of their own approaches to planning and evaluation. They noted the challenges inherent in asking patrons (students and professors) to complete surveys and the benefits of discovering stories about how libraries support student success and faculty research productivity.