

Making Dreams Come True!—How To Write A Technology Plan

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Write a technology plan! That sounds simple, doesn't it? Well, the simplicity of the words is deceiving. A technology plan, really, is a compilation of ideas, visions, dreams, hopes, and aspirations. The elements impact the effectiveness that technology can have as it is implemented, meaningfully, in your instructional setting. More pragmatically, though, most of us refer to the actual *document* as the plan. Your technology plan should encompass every aspect of your school program, including the ways in which you involve the community members in becoming increasingly a part of your robust instructional picture.

As stakeholders in your community examine your technology plan, they should all recognize the places into which they each fit. They should find areas to which they can contribute. They should be able to recognize results of efforts in which they have become engaged. Teachers, students, and administrators should be able to point to those sections that demonstrate peculiar strengths possessed by each constituency. This is no small feat for the director of the technology planning team!

Don't try to reinvent the wheel. The National Center for Technology Planning (NCTP) at Mississippi State University coordinates technology planning efforts with schools throughout the country. (See sidebar.) If you have Internet access, here you will find many examples of technology plans submitted by other schools as well as a host of other technology planning resources. Rather than attempt to compile an all-inclusive list of every conceivable activity involved in writing a technology plan for your school, in this article, I offer general reminders and pointers that will help you as you plan. These have been gleaned from the successes achieved by schools that have implemented technology plans. Remember that the technology planning document you prepare is just a simple snapshot of the *real* plan that is ongoing and is carried out by people in your school. The plan is only one phase of a continuous planning process.

The task of developing a technology plan can be made less ominous by considering the following steps.

1. GAIN ADMINISTRATIVE APPROVAL

If you are going to prepare a written technology plan, make sure your administrators understand and buy-in to this activity. You should gain the support of your principal, superintendent, and any other pertinent administrator. It may be appropriate for you to include one or more of them on your technology planning committee. You can assure the administrator that he or she does not have to feel compelled to understand everything about the technologies being discussed, but that representing the global view of school-district instructional programs is critical to the success of technology infusion. You can legitimately help your administrator to realize that this input is pivotal to the long-term success of your broad-based technology program. Once you have the excited approval and energetic support of school and/or district administration, you can press forward to achieve great things.

2. FORM A SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Next, establish a technology planning committee. Perhaps the best advice you could receive, in pondering the makeup of the committee is, *involve all the stakeholders*. This means you should include teachers, administrators, parents, students, community members, business representatives, retired supporters of the school, higher education representatives, and anyone else who has a stake in operation of your school. You may also want to include a district budget officer. When you

involve all these people, as manifested by giving them specific tasks ~~to do~~ during the planning process, you will build an increased level of support for what you are trying to achieve.

When the committee has been formed, be sure the members understand the planning process. Delineate tasks that must be accomplished. Assign tasks to individual members, giving special leadership responsibilities to some members. Form subgroups and task forces to accomplish specific jobs the committee must complete. By doing this, you enhance individuals' importance to the entire planning process and you don't pile all the work on the shoulders of just a few people. Work quickly to get your committee established, then call the initial meeting as soon as possible. Engage helpers rapidly.

Establish timelines and benchmarks to guide committee activity. Schedule meeting times so you can maintain progress reports on work accomplished. Elect or appoint a secretary who can keep good minutes of committee deliberation and action. The committee should examine technology plans prepared by schools around the country. NCTP has a repository of many excellent plans and is willing to share them with interested schools. Perhaps you will want to see plans for schools similar to yours. If the plans were prepared properly, the concepts will be the same for schools, regardless of size or demographic makeup. Don't feel that you should be limited, however, by what exists in these plans. Be expansive. Plan for the future, not just the present.

3. CONSIDER CONSULTANTS

You may want to consider hiring a consultant. Consultants aren't always highly-paid executives who drive to your school in a limousine! Often, these can be people who have been through the exact activity in which you are now engaged. You would do well to consider employing them to help identify areas that gave them trouble and activities that provided them success. It has been said that "experience is the best teacher." Perhaps you would be spending your money quite wisely—and saving money in the long run—by hiring this type consultant.

Be careful, though, and examine the consultant's motives. Ensure that they have a track record of working with other schools on the same type activity; ask to see samples of their work and contact schools with whom they've worked previously. Then, bring consultants before the committee to discuss what they propose doing for you. Remember, as long as *you* hold the money, you are in the bargaining position.

4. CONDUCT NEEDS ASSESSMENT & INVENTORY

You will need to know actual conditions in your school. You'll want to know what your colleagues' needs are if they will be expected to infuse technology into their work. Prepare technology surveys and questionnaires. Poll all school personnel (teachers, media specialists, administrators, secretaries, custodians, bus drivers, food service personnel, and other staff). You might consider surveying students, parents, and the community, too. This will give you a good picture of what situations and needs exist and what your school community thinks is needed for the future.

Don't limit the equipment inventory to computers, but include all technologies such as videodisc, CD-ROM, television, calculators, telephones, printers, scanners, modems, and LCD panels. As you tally the number of computers on hand, count only those computers that are usable and have some real purpose. Don't be tricked into counting all those that you've shuffled off to a closet; if you can't use them, don't count them.

To make this a true inventory of technology, you should enumerate such things as network connections (and types), software, CD-ROMs, Internet access points, and online services.

Perhaps you will also want to count the number of teachers who hold special certification for technology.

5. REVIEW & ANALYZE DATA

Your committee should evaluate all the data from your surveys and inventories as they prepare plans for future direction. You will be using information gathered during the needs assessment phase along with data from the technology audit to form a complete picture of the technology readiness of your school. Consider what parts of the data are appropriate for public hearings or other public distribution to explain the critical need for your actions. To convey the notion that this is not just a small committee working in isolation, you should take advantage of these hearings. In doing so, you may capture the political influence you might need during the implementation phase of your planning effort. You will gain much significant, positive inertia for your activities by ensuring that you applaud publicly the multiple efforts of your community. If you give public “pats-on-the-back,” you will gain a large following. The data that you reveal, then, can serve as extremely beneficial ammunition.

6. PREPARE THE DOCUMENT

Before you write the first word of your actual planning document, you should develop two crucial elements of a successful technology plan: the vision statement and the mission statement. Your vision statement should describe clearly and succinctly your desires for the future. Your mission statement should describe what you expect to accomplish in reaching your vision—the *raison d'être*. These two pieces of a technology plan are so important that they should be prepared, fully understood, and articulated clearly by all stakeholders.

As you begin building the actual document, you will develop a rough draft that you circulate among stakeholders. Your final report will reflect suggestions and modifications received during rough draft presentation. Be sure to mark your various drafts with the words, "ROUGH DRAFT-FOR COMMENT ONLY." The final document should contain several components that will help guarantee success. (See Figure 1.) A good strategy to follow is to develop a list of these components, place them into a rough table of contents, then usher them through to completion.

The Executive Summary

Many people who read your plan will be very busy people. They may not have time to read every word you have written, but they need to get the essential points you are trying to make. For that reason and to help focus your thinking, you should submit an executive summary—a brief statement no more than two pages in length—that reveals the main thrust of the technology plan. Have several people read the executive summary before final printing so you can ensure that your words express precisely what you want.

Critical Issues, Budget, & Timeline

Many critical issues such as curriculum, staff training, equity etc. exist in planning for the pragmatic use of instructional technologies. The examples listed in Figure 1 are not all the issues to be considered but they will give you a place to start. Assign various issues to committee members or assign a special task force to each issue. Then, let these people focus on a specific area and report to the larger group. As the committee gives periodic progress reports, the entire committee can stay abreast of overall action. Consult with as many people as possible in addressing these various topics. You might be surprised how much support you gain when stakeholders are involved deeply in preparing comments on these critical issues.

Include reference to and recommendations for a budget, referencing the costs (and subsequent benefits) of various technologies and related activities. Pay particular attention to and give special focus to professional development and improvement. Professional development is overlooked often as an essential component of ongoing investment that helps ensure successful implementation. Try to emphasize the positive aspects of budgetary planning and proper spending.

If you include a timeline in your plan, readers can see and understand easily the progress toward full implementation. All the benchmarks you and your committee have established will be easily identifiable. You can chart your successes and identify areas of weakness.

Finances

You should have a major section on finances separate from the budget. The finance section will show the school's total technology budget. You should speak to new expenses for technology and the justification for a broad-based technology support mechanism. For example, if your district does not have a technology coordinator, this is the place to substantiate that need. Many technology planners will encourage you to set aside at least 30 percent of the total budget for support issues. Since this section is one to which many people will gravitate, take the opportunity to be as positive as possible. Ensure that the dollars allocated are shown to be investments rather than mere expenditures. Remember with both investments and expenditures, there is an outlay of dollars. With investment, though, you get back much more in return than your initial outlay. With an expenditure, you may never see the results of your outlay.

Appendices

The appendix section allows you to accumulate many documents and source information that have helped you in the planning process. Here, you should include samples of your surveys, staff development sessions, committee minutes, inventories, and committee members' vitae. The appendix is a section to which you can refer throughout your plan without having to include the original documents at the specific points where you mention them; you can just direct the reader to a particular appendix. It is possible that you will want to locate your actual technology budget in the appendix so that modifications/updates to the budget can be inserted without disturbing the text portion of the plan. A particularly good idea is to enumerate activities in which most school personnel were involved. This will give people an opportunity to see their name in print and to give evidence of the widespread participation you had in developing the plan. Use this section wisely.

7. IMPLEMENT THE PLAN

This phase is much akin to moving into a new house. You have planned arduously for a long time. Now, you get to put your plans into practice and see how they work. While you are infusing the technology throughout the instructional program, keep in mind that you must allow for fine-tuning periodically. As you are writing this portion of the plan, you have the opportunity to describe, in as much detail as you want, how your plan will play out in reality. This is the heart of the plan, because teachers will apply what is planned to the learning activities of students. It can be a period of high anticipation and much celebration. Be sure that someone is keeping good records of what occurs during implementation—especially the early stages. This information can be invaluable as you revisit your plan annually.

8. EVALUATE, EVALUATE!

Now you have written your plan, gained public support, received school board approval, and begun full implementation. As soon as implementation begins, your evaluation phase will start collecting data that can be fed back into the planning cycle. You will want to guarantee that evaluation occurs in many forms. While evaluation is included as a critical issue in your plan, you need to go beyond that. You should evaluate the planning *process*. Evaluation of students, faculty, and general systemic operation must be addressed. You will want to show how evaluation results fold back into the full planning cycle. Evaluation is an ongoing activity; you should show how you intend to incorporate results in every facet of technology implementation. As this loop continues, your technology plan will be in a stage of perpetual revision.

WATCHING IT GROW

Writing a technology plan is no small feat. You are, however, up to the task, because you have plenty of help. You await a wonderful experience as you see the fruits of your work played out in the lives of teachers and students in your school. You will be able to watch the support structure grow. If you follow the steps outlined here, the *chore* of writing a technology plan will become a tremendous *opportunity* to effect great, positive change in hundreds of learners' lives.

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Sidebar 1

The National Center for Technology Planning

The National Center for Technology Planning serves as a clearinghouse for the collection, creation, and dissemination of information that is of significant benefit for technology planning. NCTP has three main functions: 1) to *collect*; 2) to *disseminate*; and 3) to *help*. Technology plans and helpful hints are *collected* from all donors. Resources are *disseminated* to those seeking aid as they develop, revise, implement, and/or evaluate their technology plan. *Help* is given by locating resources, lending on-line assistance, and providing other services. Individual schools, school districts, state departments of education, and institutions of higher learning have sent copies of their technology plans to NCTP. These are made available by NCTP via the Internet for downloading by thousands of individuals and schools around the world. In addition, a wide variety of other planning aids have been created at NCTP; these are accessible on the Internet and America Online's Scholastic Network.

How to find the NCTP:

World Wide Web <http://www.nctp.com>

Figure 1

Components of a Technology Plan

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Mission Statement
Demographics

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Express stops:

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