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University of Nebraska – Lincoln Libraries Workflow and Organizational Analysis

March 17, 2016

Carol Pitts Diedrichs and Lisa German



Introduction

Libraries everywhere are undergoing tremendous transformation in staffing, services, and collections. With the need to create new programs and services, it is critical that resources are deployed in the most efficient way possible. Library workforces across the country are aging and succession planning is important for libraries to thrive. The University of Nebraska at Lincoln Libraries invited us to review staffing, examine the organizational structure, communication pathways, and general workflows in the DARM and to make recommendations for changes that would improve and enhance service quality, improve productivity, and best align library faculty and staff with organizational priorities and needs. Our experience with a broad array of academic libraries of many types and sizes informs our consulting work, thus enabling us to provide insight and recommendations on best practices.

Without exception, the people that we spoke with were frank and open. In February 2016, we spent one and a half days meeting with the Libraries' administration, the Interim Chair of the Discovery and Resource Maintenance Department (DARM), DARM faculty and Staff, the newly formed Collection Strategies Committee, Library Systems, and the stakeholders who are served by DARM. Our analysis has benefited enormously from the ideas and comments offered by UNL library faculty and staff. These recommendations are interrelated because all aspects of the collections and technical services workflows must work successfully together. However, because we were only on site 1.5 days, we did not have the opportunity to delve deeply into the workflows. As a result, many our suggestions involve establishing a working group or a team to follow up on a process we feel needs closer examination.

Like most large research libraries, the content purchased by the UNL Libraries has shifted significantly from print to electronic. However, most of the human resources are still heavily devoted to the print workflows rather than the digital ones. As a very lean organization, making an appropriate transformation from print to digital will be needed in order for the UNL Libraries to operate at peak efficiency and effectiveness.

There are many things to be proud of at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln Libraries:

- Strong confidence and support from the University administration for the University Libraries and its Dean;
- A new Learning Commons that is a focal point at the University;
- An opportunity to create a strong collaborative environment among all the campuses of the University of Nebraska in order to take advantage of their joint buying power with funding for this initiative coming from the University Administration;
- Goodwill towards DARM exhibited by DARM's stakeholders;
- Long-tenured, experienced and talented DARM faculty and staff; and
- Hardworking staff who want to continuously improve on processes

- An Interim DARM Chair who enjoys much support from the staff

At the same time, DARM faces a number of challenges:

- Lack of a coherent collections strategy and framework;
- Little documentation on processes and procedures
- Inconsistent understanding of library systems and how they work;
- Uncertainty about priorities which result in employees working on tasks that have little value for users
- Too many staff devoted to print processing and not enough devoted to managing electronic resources and creating metadata for digital collections
- Recent turnover in chairs and uncertainty about the future leadership of the department
- Long-term gap in collections and acquisitions expertise with the loss of leadership some years ago
- Uncertainty among the staff about where to go for assistance resulting in a lack of role clarity
- No clear communication framework among and between units
- Failure to make purchased electronic collections accessible to users

High Impact Policy Recommendations

- **Develop a Collections Framework Strategy**

It is imperative that the UNL Libraries develop a collections framework or strategy to move forward into the future. Policies around collection development, retention, and decisions about print vs. electronic are either not in place or not fully vetted. With the formation of the new Collections Strategies Committee (CSC), there is an opportunity to formulate these policies. Such policies are essential to UNL but will also be crucial in order for UNL to take an appropriate leadership role with the UN Campus Libraries (UNCL).

- **Establish efficient workflows and document those workflows**

Having well documented procedures and efficient workflows will be enormously helpful for the UNL Libraries. Quite honestly, we were surprised by the lack of DARM documentation that we received. From the staff through the liaison librarians, there was a general feeling of a lack of understanding on how work gets done. At the same time, we do not recommend that staff become so focused on creating documentation to the detriment of getting the work done. But, your lack of documentation confirms our sense that those workflows are not commonly understood and as a result new employees can only be trained by word of mouth.

- **Improve communication pathways and systems**

Having ways to communicate that everyone knows and understands is crucial to an organization and one of the hardest things to accomplish but we believe you could benefit immensely from improved communication in all processes related to collections and technical services functions. Using a tool such as SharePoint regularly, creating meeting minutes with action items and follow-up, having all department meetings, potentially holding office hours, and making sure that everyone knows about new processes and procedures are all examples of concrete things that you can do to increase communications within DARM.

- **Clarify roles and responsibilities of personnel**

Everyone we spoke with from the Interim Chair to the faculty in DARM to the staff to the selectors or liaisons had difficulty defining their roles. Much of this may be attributed to the current transitional period. However, we believe this period actually started earlier with the retirement of a very well respected and knowledgeable Head of Acquisitions. One of the most positive steps already taken was the appointment of the new Interim Chair. She has already made substantial improvements in a very short period of time. We recommend that you make this a multi-year appointment to allow her the time to fully implement needed changes. We also recommend that each DARM faculty member needs to be assigned specific responsibilities according to their talents, expertise, and capabilities.

- **Grow the organization**

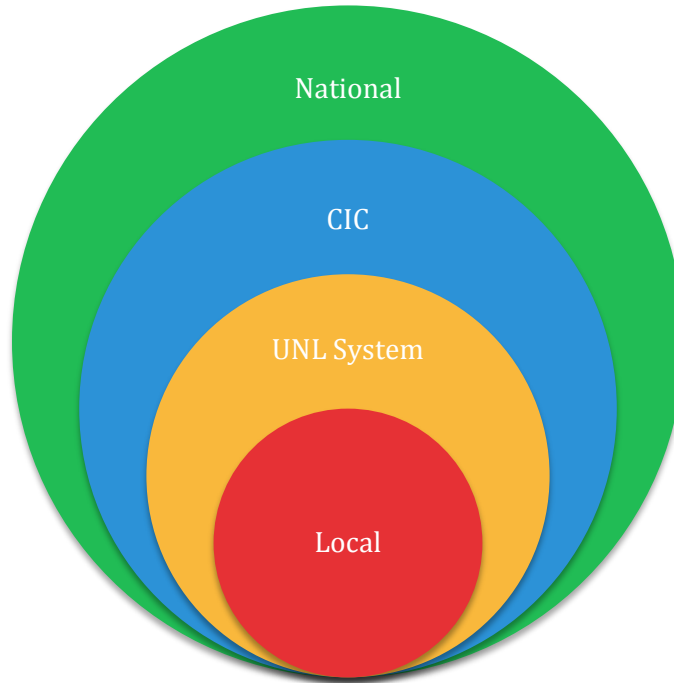
In several situations, we observed that there is only one person who has knowledge of a process. That creates risks and vulnerability for any organization. Your relatively new participation in the CIC along with the expected leadership role with the UNCL group will demand greater expertise and focus on licensing and electronic resource management. DARM will need to expand its capacity and develop its human resources to support these new roles. Much is being asked and having redundancy of expertise and some succession planning possibilities in place are essential.

The recommendations that follow will expand with more specific suggestions for each of these categories.

Collection Services Recommendations

One of the most important services that the UNL Libraries provides is access to a research collection. However, the definition of collection research collection is changing.

With deeper collaboration between the UNCL, the local collection broadens. Add the collection of the other CIC schools and the HathiTrust, and the collection becomes a global one. Decisions must be made in this new environment about what is important to hold or have access to locally, within the larger UNCL, within the CIC and what should be provided at the network level. The following diagram is a good visual guide to how these collections work in concert.



Below are suggestions for improving collection services for the UNL users

- **Collections Strategy**

Large, complex research libraries need collection strategies in order to prioritize budgets and to insure that patrons have access to materials for research and learning. The new Collections Strategies Committee has already begun to take the lead and we suggest that it appoint a small working group with membership coming from the CSC, DISC and Research and Instructional Services to create a strategy or framework. One useful framework is the collections grid described by Lorcan Dempsey which uses the axis of stewardship/scarcity and collections uniqueness. For example, how do you collect/treat materials that are scarce and unique such as your special collections, rare books, archives and manuscripts versus the more mainstream collections that are not unique to UNL and are more widely held? Using this grid as a framework, you can establish strategies for each of the four quadrants.

Dempsey, Lorcan, Constance Malpas, and Brian Lavoie. 2014. "Collection Directions: The Evolution of Library Collections and Collecting" *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 14, 3 (July): 393-423.
http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/portal_libraries_and_the_academy/summary/v014/14.3.dempsey.html

Two examples follow of the kinds of strategies that need to be considered:

- E-preferred for monographs – do you want to adopt an e-preferred policy for the purchase of monographs? If so, are there subject areas excluded from the policy? Are liaison librarians allowed to make exceptions? Once established, this policy can be implemented in DARM. We then recommend that you monitor the profile and determine if it is working effectively. Your primary monograph vendor will have tools that can assist with this analysis.
- Collection retention policies – Once collection development policies are articulated, retention policies should be developed. On good example is the Collection Retention Policy document developed by Penn State <https://www.libraries.psu.edu/content/dam/psul/up/groups/csag/CRPW-G-Final-Report-Dec-6-2012.pdf>. This type of policy addresses questions such as:
 - What is necessary to retain in the main library location?
 - What subjects are strengths of UNL and need to be retained and developed?
 - What should be retained in the local Library Depository and Retrieval Facility (LDRF)?
 - How can UNL take advantage of the CIC Shared Print Repository (SPR)

- **Access Strategy**

Your collections strategy should also include an access strategy. Using the same grid above, you can determine how items will be made accessible. For example, access to core electronic collections is going to be very different than access for rare books. If you create a framework first, you can then create an access strategy. Establish an access strategy for each of the following areas:

- High Stewardship and unique
- High Stewardship and in many collections
 - For example, Ohio State has a popular American fiction collection (first editions held in special collections). These are High Stewardship for OSU but also available in many

other collections. As a result, the access strategy for OSU is under special collections reading room policies. But numerous copies are available in other OhioLINK collections and can be borrowed from those libraries are the local public library,

- Low Stewardship in many collections
 - A good example here is the print reference titles which are now available electronically. If UNL has access electronically and does not consider these titles unique, they can be removed from the collection completely (or stored if necessary).
- Low Stewardship and unique

Collections Statistics and Assessment Recommendations

One of the gaps in the information provided to us were basic collections statistics. No one could easily answer questions such as: how many print volumes do you purchase annually, what percentage of your purchases are electronic versus print, how many titles do you bind, how many print monograph and serials volumes have been weeded, or how many print serials do you still receive? These are questions for which there should regular reporting and easily accessible answers. This kind of information should be gathered routinely and reported to appropriate supervisors and administrators.

- **Assign the Collections Strategist the responsibility for creating a collections dashboard/data warehouse**

One of the things that collections strategists do in our institutions (or are in the progress of doing) is to create a data warehouse with pertinent collections data so that anyone in the library has access to it when they need it. We suggest you begin with data needed for the ARL statistics and then continue to add to it. The University of California has an impressive data warehouse that can be found at <http://libraries.universityofcalifornia.edu/groups/files/about/docs/14-15.pdf>.

In order for the collections strategist to create such a dashboard, the individual units and workflows will need to begin to collect it. Some of this can easily be extracted from your existing local systems. Here are three good examples of data dashboards:

Appalachian State: <http://library.appstate.edu/about/planning>

Penn State: <https://www.libraries.psu.edu/psul/groups/assessmentcouncil/statistics.html>

Georgia State: <http://www.library.gatech.edu/dashboard/>

This dashboard should also be extended to include collection of usage data for electronic resources. That information will be needed for making retention and cancellation decisions.

We also recommend that you invite the vendors of your local systems back to do needed training to enable gathering of this data in an efficient manner.

- **Increase coordination between DARM, Interlibrary loan and the liaisons**

We were happy to see that UNL has a practice of purchasing items in lieu of ILL when appropriate. However, there is little collaboration between Acquisitions and ILL about this process. What guidelines does ILL work under when making decisions to purchase? How are decisions made about where to place those orders and are those decisions informed by acquisitions expertise? Beyond the purchase process, there seems to be no engagement with the liaisons about what is being purchased. Understanding the trends in ILL would better inform the collection development practices of the liaisons. We recommend that a small working group be formed including DARM, ILL, and liaisons to determine 1) how regular information can to be provided to the liaisons and 2) to investigate cross-departmental training and expertise.

Serial and Electronic Resources Recommendations

Access to electronic resources is one of the most important core services that a library provides today. The UNL workflow needs considerable refinement. Such a workflow takes the process from selection through access and should create robust documentation of that process.

- **Revise the review process for serials**

The decision to move print titles to electronic format is currently being made by the acquisitions accountant rather than by someone charged with collections strategy. There are two possible approaches to this this issue:

- Establish an e-preferred policy for all serials – with such a policy then a routine process to search for electronic versions can be undertaken by staff on a regular basis. When found, the access is switched from print to electronic. Exceptions can be made based on overarching disciplines areas.
- The alternate approach is for a list to be generated by acquisitions and the decision to enable access to the electronic version would be made by the appropriate liaison librarian.

The first step, however, is to determine a preference for electronic as part of

your collections framework or strategy. In our experience, most librarians have made the decision (based on user preferences) to purchase an electronic version whenever available. Occasional exceptions are made based on rendering of the content in e-form. Once the policy is established, it should be documented along with the process for execution.

- **Establish a formal process for reviewing titles and making cancellation decisions**

Liaison librarians do not understand the process for review and cancellation decisions. Working with the Collections Strategies Committee and the liaison librarians, DARM should establish a formal review process, document the process, and put the process in place for this fiscal year. The process should include the timeline and deadlines for decisions. Each year the process can be refined and revised as needed.

We were left with the impression that items are simply renewed each year without review (unless cancellations are required). Most libraries gather usage data annually and use that to inform decisions. For most libraries, the only way to add new titles is to cancel lower use ones. This process needs more active management than is currently taken.

- **Establish a champion for new products**

When a new electronic resource is purchased, we recommend that you assign someone (usually an appropriate liaison librarian) to become familiar with the product and understand its uses and capabilities. Then on a routine basis those new products should be shared with everyone doing public service work so they are knowledgeable about the new resource. The key role for the champion is to teach others about the features of the resource. Not having someone in this role leads to a lack of understanding about how resources work. One example given to use was the recent purchase of a subscription to Browzine.

- **Establish a process for the acquisition and management of electronic resources**

There is a clear lack of transparency and understanding about how and when new electronic resources are purchased. Even if an individual has requested a purchase, they are unsure of when it becomes available. Sadly, they often learn about it from a faculty member who has discovered it online first.

There is also a great need for tracking license agreements and renewal timelines. Sierra is the best place for this information in your environment but considerable work is needed to locate and enter the needed information. One possible approach for tackling this is to begin with each license as it is renewed, making

sure that all the information is entered. Then retrospective information can be added as time permits. This is another area where additional training is needed.

In the same vein, there is little understanding of how records for electronic books are added to the catalog, how proxies are added to the URLs, and when and how e-journal records are added to the catalog and the journals A-Z list. This area is ripe for a small working group to clarify and document the process and then communicate that process to the Library's faculty and staff

Acquisitions, Cataloging and Physical Processing Recommendations

- **Conduct an OCLC reclamation project**

OCLC reclamation projects are a great way to ensure that your online catalog is accurate. That improved accuracy is of great benefit to Interlibrary Loan and to your users. (Plus OCLC will do one for free). A copy of the local database of catalog records is sent to OCLC and it is matched to the holdings in OCLC. If there are materials in the local catalog and not in OCLC, they are added. If records for UNL holdings are in OCLC and not the local catalog, then records are sent to UNL so that you can match the record against what you actually own. Once this is accomplished, then the holdings can be added to OCLC. Many libraries have done this in order to make sure their local and OCLC holdings are aligned. There is local work that must be done after the initial match but we highly recommend that UNL take advantage of the opportunity.

- **Re-examine using PromptCat for remaining print purchases from YBP**

Using technology to its fullest allows staff to focus on processes that are best accomplished locally. We suggest that you re-examine using PromptCat for material purchased through YBP. One of the MP supervisors could lead this effort.

- **Combine the receiving and cataloging processes**

We strongly recommend that you find a way to reduce the number of times a newly received item is "handed off" to the next person to perform a function. Fewer handoffs lead to greater efficiency. Combining the receiving and cataloging processes into one activity is far more efficient. The mainstream materials that you still order in print will most likely have catalog records so that with appropriate training, the staff member receiving the title can also review the cataloging and confirm it is correct. Then the item can be sent directly to physical processing.

- **Review workflow for barcoding and physical processing**

We did not have enough time to delve into this workflow but we sense that far too many handoffs were in place. Item records and barcodes are added in the physical processing stage at UNL; most libraries do that work (at least the creation of the item record) during receipt and cataloging. We recommend that you revisit this workflow in search of greater efficiency.

- **Review the process for invoice payment**

We were surprised to learn that invoices are paid only one week a month. The explanation for this is that it allows them to reconcile the budget with the university but restricting the time for invoice payment. We do not have enough information to determine if that results in delays in payment but it is not a common practice. Most libraries pay invoices daily as they are received and reviewed.

- **Re-institute the acquisitions listserv for the receipt of orders not found in GOBI**

The use of a listserv for submitting orders not found in GOBI is the most efficient way to ensure receipt and handling in a timely fashion. This practice had been used in the past and should be restored. Once restored the liaisons should be first check GOBI and place orders there when possible. Items not in GOBI should be submitted via the listserv.

- **Implement outsourced authority control**

We understand that some investigation of outsourcing authority control has been made but not implemented. We recommend that you move quickly to implement an outsourced approach to this task.

- **Appoint a faculty cataloging resource person to respond to questions and do problem solving**

As noted above, much of the routine cataloging is now done by DARM staff. However, on occasion they need to consult with the more knowledgeable cataloging faculty to answer questions or resolve complex cataloging issues. One of the faculty librarians in DARM should be assigned this role.

Systems and Training Recommendations

Vulnerabilities and risks occur in an organization when knowledge about a particular process or system is invested in a single person. This appears to be true at the University of Nebraska Libraries in terms of knowledge about the integrated library system and other systems. We see this in many organizations that have had the same system environment for long periods of time. We recommend the following:

- **Begin succession planning in Systems**

Having only one person who understands the system environment in the Libraries, presents a huge risk to the organization. This is an area that needs redundancy and there are likely people internal to the organization that can begin to be trained in some of these responsibilities. We also recommend that all of your current processes be documented as soon as possible.

- **Enhance overall training in using your existing local systems**

In a related problem to the bullet above, we do not believe that everyone is fully versed in the use of the various ILS modules and other systems. This can often happen when new employees arrive and do not receive adequate training. It can also happen over time when the same systems have been in place. New features are added but not implemented. Permissions are implemented in a very restricted fashion in the early implementation and then never expanded to allow more individuals to use those features. We recommend that you engage the vendor to provide refresher training.

- **Expand access to the system for completing work**

The failure to load electronic records (which is now being solved) is symptomatic of long standing problems with access and permissions in the ILS. There are examples where an individual was assigned the work, trained to do the work, and then not given appropriate access to the system to do the work long-term. As these issues are revealed, they should be resolved.

- **Allow individuals with appropriate expertise to load and experiment with new software**

In today's world, librarians often have considerable IT expertise. They are currently prevented from loading or experimenting with new software which might enhance the workflow. This imitation should be reviewed and expanded as appropriate.

Communication, Planning and Documentation Recommendations

Though we often think of communication, assessment, planning and documentation as "soft skills", they are some of the most important skills for library faculty and staff. These skills are critical to optimizing a library's overall performance. As a result, the absence of these things often leads to misunderstandings, crisis situations, and the inability to execute. As has already happened at UNL, when experts leave the library without documenting their work, it leaves an organization vulnerable. These skills are interrelated and addressing them will benefit the University Libraries. During our on-site

visit, we often heard from a variety of groups that they either did not understand a process, did not know how something worked, or did not know who did what. We recommend the following to improve communication:

- **Improve the process for reporting and tracking e-resource problems**

We heard a great deal about the problems with reporting e-resource problems and tracking resolution. You are on the right track with implementation of your Footprints system. These systems (often designed to track IT problems) are well designed for tracking problems and providing feedback and information on their resolution. The next most essential step is to close the feedback loop as problems are worked and resolved. Specifically, we recommend that you create a feedback loop so that people can track the progress of a report and be informed when access is restored. At present, when liaisons report problems, they do not hear when the problem has been fixed.

- **Create a SharePoint document for who does what in DARM.**

Those outside DARM do not know to whom to report issues and problems or where to seek information. We recommend that DARM create that documentation and share it with the entire library via SharePoint. That way, people outside of DARM will know who to go to and for what.

- **Create a regular forum for engagement between DARM and the liaison librarians.**

The CSC has already begun a series of quarterly meetings with liaison librarians around collections. The DARM faculty and MPs would benefit greatly from regular engagement with the liaison librarians to discuss new processes or projects.

- **Expand use of SharePoint to create, maintain and share documentation.**

The implementation of SharePoint is an excellent path forward for shared access to documentation.

Organizational Structure and Staffing Recommendations

Having a high functioning organizational structure enables an organization to move forward and accomplish critical work. The recent re-organization made some very concrete and productive steps forward. We were very impressed with the leadership of the interim chair of DARM. She has already made a number of important improvements which were noted by the stakeholders group.

The UNL Libraries has an extraordinary amount of experience in the faculty and staff of

DARM. Many of the faculty are at a very senior level as are the staff. We were struck by how well the MP staff collaborate with one another. The staff supervisors with more experience assist the ones who are at the beginning of their careers. As a group, they are functioning very well. The staff generally praised their staff supervisors and the Interim chair. Our staffing suggestions are designed to take advantage of everyone's expertise and also to ensure that the staff have appropriate access to expertise when they have questions.

- **Leadership**

DARMS is in a period of transition. The Dean has made some organizational changes and an Interim Chair has been appointed to provide leadership and direction to the department. We recommend that the Interim Chair be given a multiyear appointment of 2-3 years in duration. She is doing an excellent job of energizing the staff, communicating both within the department and with other units in the Libraries. This will bring stability and certainty to the department and will allow the Chair to strategically lead the department through the next period of change.

- **Take advantage of DARM faculty expertise**

The DARM faculty are highly experienced and very knowledgeable. They are engaged on campus and are very active in the profession. But frankly we were surprised at the large number of faculty members in DARM and that virtually all of them were focused on cataloging and metadata. Each faculty member has skills that will benefit the organization if deployed in the right areas. We recommend the following:

- Appoint one faculty resource librarian for the staff
- Assign one faculty member to catalog rare and special collections
- Assign a faculty member to be the primary metadata librarian
- Assign one faculty member to concentrate on copy and original cataloging for music materials
- Move one faculty member to liaison services without cataloging responsibilities in order to add additional assistance to research and instructional services.

- **Hire an head of collections and an electronic resources librarian**

Every organization has gaps of expertise to fill. We see two glaring gaps in expertise in DARM: a strong head of collections and an experienced electronic resources librarian. Work in these areas is only going to increase in the future and we believe these two hires should be top priorities for UNL.

The appointment of the Collections Strategies Committee was a good first step in developing a more robust collections strategy. But the volume of work to manage a modern research library collection demands a full-time collections expert. This individual would also play a key role in representing UNL in the CIC and in UNCL. The current collections strategist would report to this position. There was also some sense that the collections budget needs more robust management. This would be an appropriate task for a head of collections.

Electronic resource management is a fractured workflow and process. The liaison librarians do not understand the process; records go for a long period of time without being loaded and this has an adverse effect on discovery of resources for your patrons. With the plans for additional responsibilities of UNCL, an electronic resources librarian will be essential to success. Most of the libraries we have observed use this position to take the lead on licensing, administering the electronic resource management system and working with e-resources vendors.

Like technical services units in many libraries, you have staff at lower levels doing work that should either be done by students or not done at all. Work in technical services has changed and the need for staff doing clerical work is much more limited. We believe that you have too many positions below the MP level. Going forward, we recommend that you view each vacancy as an opportunity to repurpose the vacant position. Positions will still be needed in DARM but the work has become more complex and different skills are needed; you need new skills now and in the future.

- **Move the branch librarians to Research and Instructional Services**

The branch librarians have much in common with the liaison librarians. Their work would be enhanced by closer engagement with those in Research and Instructional Services. Such a move also will bring together the collections and instruction activities of all the liaisons. We recommend that the branch librarians report to Research and Instructional Services.

- **Empower the MP supervisors in DARM**

Uniformly we heard from the people who report to them and from the stakeholders whom they serve that the MP supervisors in DARM are doing an excellent job. You have one supervisor who has many years of experience and two others with less experience but excellent potential. We also suggest that you provide them with additional leadership and managerial training.

Conclusion

Recommendations from an external viewpoint can have enormous value, but of course they have limitations. Having only spent 1.5 days on-site, we may have made mistakes in what we heard and saw. However, we believe these recommendations will greatly enhance your effectiveness and success.

Thank you very much for participating in this process. Although there are a number of key things you can improve, your organization is built on a very solid foundation.