

Library Administrators, Leadership, and the Building Expansion Process

An Architect's Point of View

Michael Esmay

As an architect, I feel very lucky to be able to design public libraries. Over the years I have worked on additions and expansions, on new construction, and on historic library buildings. I have come to love public libraries because they are just that, public. A public library is a true center for the community—a place for learning and meeting, accessible to all. The public library reflects a culture of community that we should be proud to foster. A public library provides the best bang for the buck, in terms of creating a locus for the community.

In this article, I will discuss, from the architect's point of view, the beginning stages of the planning process as it relates to the expansion of a small to mid-sized public library, whether this expansion is an addition to an existing library or the construction of a new building. My focus will be on the library administrator and the leadership role that he or she will play in the library expansion. For the discussion on planning, I will primarily draw on the Nyack Library expansion project, which is in its beginning stages. The Nyack (N.Y.) Public Library (NPL) serves a population of 9,500 in a small village on the Hudson River, about thirty miles north of Manhattan. It is a Carnegie Library, constructed in 1903. An addition was built in the 1970s, but it has been outgrown. The new expansion falls in the middle of the range of library projects I have worked on over the years—20,000 sq. ft.

Characteristics of Great Public Libraries

How many really great public libraries have you visited? How many really good ones? While my focus will be on the ins and outs of the planning process that leads to the design of a library expansion, I think it may be wise to talk a bit about the characteristics of a really successful public library.

I have studied many libraries around the country and the world, from Michelangelo's Laurentian Library in Florence to the State Library in Tasmania. From this experience I have formed an abiding interest in discovering what makes some libraries successful and others a disappointment. I want to understand how successful libraries come to be.

This has led me to try to identify the critical questions that were asked and answered by the people who built

these successful libraries. Who asked the questions and who answered them? How were critical decisions made and through what process?

To begin, I offer this list of characteristics:

- Place in the community—Does the library capture the history, image and spirit of the community?
- Inclusiveness—Is the library a welcoming place for everyone in the community, with provisions within the library for different groups, from young adults to seniors?
- Access to learning—Is there the availability of many kinds of materials and a successful means of dissemination?
- Stimulating atmosphere—Does the library have a buzz? Does it feel like a place where people are experiencing new ideas?
- General feeling and comfort level—Do the colors, materials, lighting, and views make the library a pleasing place to be? Would I want to spend hours there researching, studying, or sitting and reading?
- Clarity of layout—Is the library easy to figure out? Does the organization make sense? Could a patron find his way around if there were no signs?

How Do Library Expansions Come About?

The decision to consider a library expansion usually comes when there is a critical shortage of space. There may be no more space for books. The library may be using the tops of the stacks for books, putting books on rolling carts, or culling the library's collection to make room for new materials. The number of computers may fall short of need, leading to sign-in sheets, usage monitoring, and lengthy waits for terminals. The library's meeting area may have room for forty when the need is one hundred. There may be an unmet need for tutorial space. There may be no room for the growing young adult collection.

So, how does one define the problem for planning purposes? What are the steps that will define the problems and lead to solutions? Someone, usually the library

Michael Esmay (mikeesmay@aol.com) has an architectural firm in the Hudson River Valley Region of New York.

administrator, has to communicate the changing needs of the library to the board of directors, and the board makes the decision to proceed.

One might assume this would involve a simple exchange of ideas and establishment of a way to proceed, but for varying reasons many libraries don't know how to methodically approach and complete the critical task of determining the true needs of each library's unique population. Sometimes no one even wants to start the discussion. There may be a fear of change, a fear of failure, concern about spending taxpayer money, or simply no stomach for such a big job.

Where there is no strong direction from the library administrator, based on actual library usage and need, the motivation for a library expansion may come from the public, or, worse, it may come from a sense that "everyone else is doing one."

Reliance on focus groups is an example of a lack of leadership from the library administrator and the board. In my experience, the outcome of focus groups is of limited value to the planning process because of the small number of library patrons who participate and their inability to look at the library in its totality. An experienced, professional library administrator and a committed library board with the community's interest at heart are best positioned to identify and address the current and future needs of the library population.

Preparing for a library expansion is an active ongoing process. Hopefully, a library board has a long-range planning process to anticipate and deal with issues of growth. Many communities have suffered because the library board neglected to:

- look for opportunities to acquire land for future growth;
- implement financing strategies for a capital fund, which might take the form of a mortgage, a bond, or capital fund-raising; and
- maintain public and community relations, which include anticipating and developing support for capital expenditure through consistent communication over time.

How Do Library Expansions End Up Being So Large (and Costly)?

In my area, Metropolitan New York, there has been an explosion of library projects. Every public library in Rockland County, where my firm is located, has grown, and most of the expansion has been through additions. The last boom in library projects was in the '60s and '70s. These expansions were built around the conventional idea of libraries as rows of stacks, with separate areas for reading and study.

The convention has changed. Demands on space have changed. Old rules that still to some extent drive the

design of libraries don't apply anymore. One example is the rule of thumb that is used to determine the space requirements of a library. Typically, it is set at .75 to 1 square foot per person served by the library. From my experience, requirements for space have doubled, at a minimum. Projects I have worked on in recent years have averaged more than two square feet per person served, doubling the size of the project. In fact, the proposed expansion of the public library in Nyack, New York, will double the size of the library, resulting in a change from 1.6 square feet to 3.2 square feet per person served. There are many reasons why the space requirements for public libraries have changed so radically. Some of the reasons are detailed below.

Children. The children's room is where it all starts—a child's introduction to learning outside of the home. In the past, the children's room was just a miniature version of the adult areas of the library, with shorter shelves and furniture scaled for a child's use. Today, parents and children are more demanding. They know what is available in the realm of early childhood development, and they expect it to be available at the library. More and more, children's rooms are being designed in a way that clearly distinguishes them from adult sections of the library. Picture book display, areas for reading, computer terminals, story hour seating, and activity rooms all contribute to the increase in the size of children's rooms. One time I arrived at a library in Rochester, New York, just as it was opening. I was stunned to see the waiting children make a mad dash for a seat in front of the computers in the children's room, and this need is only going to grow. In my experience, the children's room is the largest specific area used in a public library, aside from the stacks. NPL must house forty thousand children's books. Other libraries may only need half as many volumes to serve their population, and this need can only be articulated by the library administrator working closely with his or her staff.

Tweens. A new subset of library users is tweens. They are not young children, but not adult readers either. Some libraries are finding that this group benefits from an area set aside specifically for them, either within the children's room or in a room of their own.

Young adult. Teen readers are another growing population of library users who are obviously different from adult readers. Including a young adult room is becoming more common in library expansions. At the very least, there is frequently a discussion of the need for this. The hard part seems to be how to define young adults and determine their needs. I have seen many young adult rooms that are barely used or that are used by older patrons. A fishbowl atmosphere and a sterile environment seem to be the cause. Successful young adult rooms I have visited have included comfortable seating, computer stations, and teen-related books and periodicals in a welcoming environment. In the NPL planning process, the reference librarian worked with a youth committee that made suggestions not only on the content of the proposed young adult room,

but on the design. Their articulated needs are calling for a fairly large space, to be located within the library in a way that addresses noise and security issues.

New media. Not too long ago, a library's videotape collection could be easily kept on shelves behind the circulation desk. Today, videos, DVDs, CD-ROMs, music CDs, and books on tape or CD are probably the second most sought-after materials in the library, right behind the new books and periodicals. In the case of the NPL, there has been a quadrupling of space required to house the library's collection and a need to locate these materials in a central location.

Merchandising. Over many years, I have watched as library administrators have discovered merchandising of library materials. For example, they have found that books displayed face-forward at the ends of the aisles tend to circulate more than those shelved in the stacks. Materials sitting on a return cart are often checked out before they are even reshelved. Merchandising provides the library staff with ongoing opportunities to bring the attention of the library population to books and subjects it might not have considered. In the NPL expansion, the library administrator, working with the reference librarians, has developed an approach in which all nonfiction books will be merchandised in areas of specific interest, such as science and technology or history, in effect creating rooms within rooms. Each topic area will include stacks, display units, seating, and desks. Creating these areas will involve a lot more space than in a traditional library.

Computer resource room. When visiting public libraries today, you will find a large percentage of the library patrons sitting at computers. Computers are located throughout the library, as well as within a computer resource center. Patrons expect to have a large number of computers available at the library for their use. Sign-up sheets and long waits for computers are a common reason for the public to want a library to expand. In the case of NPL, the expansion will allow the library to increase the number of computers from eighteen to thirty. Computer resource rooms are not only used by individual library patrons, they may also serve a classroom function, including long distance learning and teleconferencing. All this requires a large, flexible space.

Community meeting rooms. Libraries lie at the heart of the community, and the meeting room in the public library is often the community meeting place. My experience is that when one is provided there is tremendous usage. The public library in Valley Cottage, New York, has three rooms of varying sizes for community use, and they are booked far in advance. In a library expansion, determining the size of the community room(s) can be a problem. The library administrator is faced with anticipating potential use, deciding how many people should be served, whether or not there should be kitchen facilities, what level of audio-visual system should be installed, who will coordinate room use, and so on. The tendency is for larger, more

flexible rooms that can be set up with auditorium seating, arranged as an art gallery, or used for a sit-down dinner. In the case of NPL, the new meeting room will have space for 120 people, up from 40.

Art display. Traditionally, libraries make do when it comes to display space for art. You might find art hung on the walls of the meeting room or wherever there might be some empty space on a wall. Some libraries are deciding to create space devoted solely to the display of art in a gallery-like setting. The result has been a boon. A display space for art augments the tone of the library, draws people to the library, and can be a source of money for the library, with the library getting a percentage of sales. It also serves a public function, providing an opportunity for local artists to display their work. The Valley Cottage Library has dedicated gallery space near the circulation desk, which has become so popular that the shows are booked almost three years in advance. As exciting as this is, a gallery in the library requires space.

Staff work rooms. The windowless processing room behind the circulation desk is becoming a thing of the past, mostly because it is ill suited to today's (and, for that matter, yesterday's) needs. The trend is toward larger, better situated, more humane, and better equipped work areas. These spaces have grown in every library expansion I have worked on. They are being designed for their intended use and not as an afterthought. However, planning work spaces can be complicated. Access and flow are concerns, and issues of hierarchy can arise, with everyone wanting a spot to call his or her own. Sorting this out without being extravagant with space will evolve from discussions between the library administrator and the staff. Every library I have worked on has arrived at a different solution, and every one has required more space than originally planned. In NPL, the new work room will be three times larger than the one the staff now uses.

Local history. In smaller communities, libraries have become the repositories of historic material. Some, like NPL, provide space specifically devoted to the housing and access of this material. Often these spaces are tended by members of the local historical society, who operate independently of the library, obtaining the historic materials and cataloging them. In the case of NPL, the materials have overflowed their space, and the plan is to include a local history area in the library expansion that is three times the size of the existing room.

Quiet study. The era of the soundless public library, presided over by a stern librarian, is over, and probably has been for a while. Public libraries are bustling places where finding a quiet corner can be a challenge. Many library expansions include quiet study areas. These areas or rooms may be used for individual study, tutoring, or even small group meetings. To offset the space needed for quiet study areas, one library I have worked on chose to house its special collections, such as law books, within quiet study rooms.

Seniors. Seniors are an important part of the community, and they form a large percentage of library users. Americans with Disabilities Act requirements may add elevators, ramps, accessible shelving, and wider aisles to the library expansion plan. I am currently working on a library that is considering a separate room devoted to seniors—a “haven,” in the word of the library administrator.

Information desk. Many large libraries have separate information desks, and now many smaller libraries also are putting them in. Taking the general information function away from the circulation and reference desk can improve service. The public library in Mahopac, New York, built a general information desk into the popular materials area near the entry. The person staffing the desk answers inquiries, recommends new books, disseminates information on local events, and basically acts as a clearinghouse for information. Adding this useful service meant increasing the size of the popular materials area.

Deep storage. As the merchandising of books gains favor, there is still a need to house the vast majority of the library's books. Less frequently borrowed materials can be stored on compact shelving in a deep storage area and made accessible by request only. Adding deep storage to the library expansion plan can help maintain the breadth of the library's collection and reduce the number of books being culled.

Bookstore and other nonlibrary functions. Many public libraries today devote space to the sale of used books, both donations from patrons and culls from the library's collection. Often, books are stored for long periods in anticipation of an annual book sale run by the Friends of the Library. Some libraries are choosing to create a bookstore area, run by library volunteers, to sell used books on an ongoing basis. This requires a publicly accessible space for the books. Another nonlibrary function is a café or food service area. Some libraries are installing cafés to compete with bookstores such as Barnes and Noble. My experience is that these schemes rarely work, because there is not enough money generated to support the concession. The costs associated with constructing a café outweigh the benefits. In NPL, a café that already adjoins the library is being linked to the building with an outdoor patio area, and library patrons will be allowed to bring their beverages into designated parts of the library. The success of this remains to be seen, but no extra space or money was needed to try the experiment.

Who Are the Players and Personalities?

Let's say that, in whatever fashion, a library board has decided to add to the facility. There is a cast of characters who will be involved in getting an agreement as to the scope and nature of the library expansion before any design is done. Let me outline my view of the different players who will participate in the planning process and their roles.

Library Board

The library board has several roles. Ideally, they are the strategic planners who put things in place so that a library expansion is possible. They develop the fund-raising strategies and perform the public outreach that maintains public support for the library and its growth. They make the decision to pursue a library expansion. In the words of James Mahoney, NPL library director, “The role of the board is to take this risk.” In Nyack, the library board really did its job. Over a number of years they have purchased three properties adjacent to the library building which will now be used in the expansion.

Library Consultant

A library consultant may be called on to help the library administrator assess what conditions currently exist in the library and determine what is minimally necessary to accomplish the expansion goals. A consultant typically evaluates the existing facility, department by department, and makes recommendations. In my experience, a library consultant is not absolutely necessary. As I see it, library evaluation is a function of the library administrator's expertise. A library consultant can help the library administrator to organize his or her thoughts, but the impetus should come from the person most familiar with use patterns in the library. In the end, a consultant can't articulate the heart and soul of a library. I question the need to rely on an outside expert to evaluate and make proposals based on very short acquaintance.

The library administrator may need some information as to how he or she should tackle the job, but there is no real benefit in handing off the task. A library administrator can become educated on the planning process by visiting other libraries that have gone through the process and conferring with their administrators.

A library consultant can inform the library administrator and the board about new ideas, new fixtures, and so on, drawing on experience with other libraries, but I think a successful library expansion will evolve from the library administrator defining the problem within the context of his or her community; the library consultant, if hired, should remain in a supporting role.

Public

The public are important as the end users of the library, and their changing needs drive the library expansion, but their contribution to the actual planning process is limited. Ideally, the role of the public is to support the decisions of the library administrator and the library board. This support grows from ongoing efforts by the library administrator and the library board to understand their library population. For example, changes in the library population may foster a growing need for non-English library

materials, additional media for children, or more computer terminals. If the library administrator and the library board are consistent in showing interest in the concerns of the public, the library population will be more likely to support the proposed expansion. Continuing communication and outreach to the public cannot be replaced with a couple of focus groups. In my experience, focus groups are often poorly attended and provide little useful information.

At NPL, the public did provide important input that had a significant impact on the library expansion. As stated earlier, the library is a historic Carnegie library and a very important local landmark. The library administrator and the library board became aware of the public's desire to preserve the entrance of the building even though it is not accessible to those with disabilities. A ramp first proposed for the front entrance will be positioned at another entrance in order to respect the public's concerns. While it might be more logical to change the front entrance, the interests of the library population took precedence.

On the whole, the public's library use helps to define the needs that should be met with the library expansion. Every library I have worked with has had different usage patterns. The public library in Ardsley, New York, has a vibrant fiction section and a moribund reference function. On the other hand, at NPL fiction plays second fiddle to nonfiction and reference. However, usage patterns can only tell part of the story. Sometimes there are areas in a library that are underused because they are poorly laid out or inaccessible. A library expansion gives the library administrator a chance to adjust the relationships within the library to best serve the needs of the library population.

Architect

The architect's attitude of "hire me and I will solve all your problems" may create a level of comfort for the library board, but it may not deliver the best library expansion. Experience in building libraries, while good, is not absolutely necessary to the design of a great library. Rather than focusing on an architect's experience, the library board and library administrator may want to focus on how the architect plans to tackle the most important part of the entire project—the part that comes before the actual design of the building. This is when the architect must listen, ask questions, and discuss the issues facing the library. He or she can add to the discussion and advise as to what is possible, but the last thing a library needs is an architect who dictates what the new library should be. As the NPL library administrator, James Mahoney, put it, "The architect helps me, as library administrator, to put things into perspective." The planning process is a synthesis, a coming together of a multitude of needs, ideas, and influences that will be reconciled in concrete and steel. If one party is to dominate, it should be the library administrator, whose knowledge is central to the planning process.

I have had conversations with library directors who have complained that the architects they worked with simply did not listen to them. According to Mahoney, "This should be a listening process, open and flexible with no preconceived notions." During the planning process, the library administrator works with his or her staff to accumulate data that defines the needs of the expansion and then communicates this to the architect. In the end, the architect is there to serve the needs of the library, not the needs of his or her ego.

Building Committee

In my experience, every library expansion utilizes a building committee. This is typically a subcommittee of the library board that has been given the responsibility of acting as liaison between the board, the library administrator, and the architect. The building committee is the voice of the library board. The entire library board is typically too large to be directly involved with the planning process.

The function of the building committee is to work with the library administrator and the architect during the various stages of the project and to keep the rest of the board aware of progress. Hopefully, the board members who serve on the building committee are the ones who have the most enthusiasm about the expansion and have ample time to devote to the project. A lot of hours will be spent on the project before the building is complete.

Often, the building committee includes someone who is familiar with the building process as well as the board president. NPL is fortunate to have the former library director of the Valley Cottage Library on the library board. Ellen Simpson has led two construction projects in her library and is now the head of the building committee for NPL. The library administrator participates in the meetings of the building committee and reports its discussions to the architect. I have been involved in discussions over the role of building committees in which the debate centered on whose responsibility it is to develop the building program. Some say the library administrator; others think it is the role of the building committee. I believe that it is the role of the library administrator to develop and propose a building program and the role of the building committee to build consensus among the members of the entire library board for the plan. As Simpson told me, "If board members dictate, you could have a result that will saddle the physical library, and consequently the community, with inefficiencies and wastefulness."

Construction Manager

Unless a library expansion is exceptionally small or simple, I recommend adding a qualified construction manager to the team. Sometimes a construction manager will try to take over the library administrator's role in orchestrating the planning, but this is not appropriate. The role of the

construction manager is to discuss possible construction scenarios (in the case of a library that will remain open during construction) and, more importantly, develop cost studies. The library administrator's involvement with the construction manager at this stage is purely informational. The library administrator relates to the construction manager what library functions must be kept going during construction, information that the library administrator is best suited to provide.

There is traditionally thought to be a conflict between an architect and a construction manager. Many architectural firms want to provide the services that a good construction manager can offer. However, I feel that there is something to be gained from having another pair of eyes looking at the various design proposals and making cost-saving recommendations.

When the scope of the project has been determined and the funding sources assured, it is good to have a qualified construction manager as part of the team during design development to advise on the viability of construction approaches, development of construction working drawings, specifications, and bidding packages. All this is invaluable and is done prior to the actual bidding.

Library Administrator (and Staff)

The library administrator has the leadership role in the library expansion process. First, he or she has the critical task of defining the needs that drive the library expansion. Working with the staff, the library administrator accumulates data on current usage and future needs and then communicate the conclusions to the board and the architect. "The library administrator must educate," is how Mahoney has put it to me many times. Communication is key to a good design, and it takes time to fully air the issues raised by the conclusions of the library administrator, address the concerns of the board, and bring the architect up to speed on the direction the library has chosen. Throughout the process, the library administrator represents the library's positions to the architect and others. As Simpson put it to me, "The library administrator is the chief executive officer, who is paid for his or her experience and, as such, should lead."

Coordination is another role that the library administrator plays. Often the libraries I have worked on have remained open during construction. This forces the library administrator to wear two hats—running a public library and building a library expansion.

What Is Involved in Reaching Consensus and "Getting to Yes?"

Planning is the backbone of library design. It is the process that initiates the project, and it continues until the opening ceremony. Planning for a successful library

begins with information gathering. In this initial phase, the library administrator assesses the existing conditions and develops a program for the expansion. Input is garnered from the library staff and other key people. The conclusions made in this phase are presented to the board, which reviews and comments on the needs outlined by the library administrator.

Next the library administrator presents the conclusions to the architect, and they begin very preliminary approaches to a possible design solution, basically working out the relationships between the different elements in the library. The initial thinking about how the library can be added to and altered begins at this stage. Communication between the architect and the library administrator is key. At NPL, the library administrator provided input that had a significant impact on the design. In working with him, I was made aware of how security is now an important consideration in public libraries. This led to a rethinking of a plan that I had proposed—one based on sound relationships—but one that did not take security into consideration. Together we came up with a plan that provides anchors on each floor—areas of greater public use that create safety in numbers. The result of our open communication has led to a better library design.

Based on the schematic approach put together by the library administrator and the architect, a preliminary budget estimate can be developed predicated on informed assumptions. This is where the qualified construction manager can be invaluable.

With the schematic approach and the preliminary budget complete, the focus shifts to the library board. The library board must approve the program requirements and the proposed budget. They may also project the schedule for completing the expansion.

In my experience, after the hard work of determining needs and developing the program, the library board can become quite arbitrary about setting a budget. Often, budgets are set solely on what the library board feels the public might support. Sometimes a number will come from one person on the board, based on one or two conversations they have had, nothing more. Building support for a library expansion is a process that must be conducted with consistent effort over time. Members of the library board are elected as representatives of the community. It is their role to build support for the library by promoting the benefits of the expansion to their constituencies. To their credit, NPL has established a realistic budget that should accomplish all of its goals.

On occasion I have been faced with trying to satisfy program requirements without the necessary funds to make it possible. In that case, the library administrator has to prioritize the program elements and defend those that are most important to the improved functioning of the library. In the end, my recommendation is always to build as much space as possible. You can fill it or finish it better later.

How Do You Keep the Process on Track and Get a Successful Library Expansion?

The human factor plays a large role in the planning process, by which I mean that egos may affect the outcome. How do you get past personality to get the best out of each participant? In any functioning group, there will be a facilitator who will help the participants achieve consensus. In my experience, this driver may be any member of the planning participants, but the library administrator is in the best position to act as the referee.

The important thing is that all parties approach the process with an open mind and bring all their information

and enthusiasm to the table. This will result in a clear statement of library needs and a realistic plan to achieve them. Throughout the effort the library administrator is the key player and must take a leadership position in the process.

The moment when a board reaches consensus and votes to proceed with a library expansion is always very exciting and often results in cheers and applause. No matter how small or large the project, it will have a considerable impact on the community and despite the inevitable problems, it will be well worth the effort.

The Risk and Insurance Management Manual for Libraries

The Essential Guide to Protecting Your Library's Collections, Buildings, and Assets.

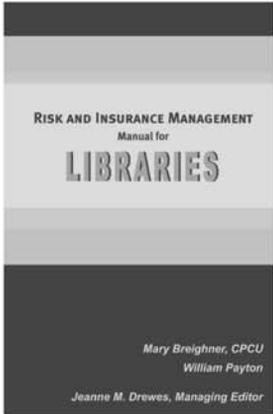
Authors:
Mary Breighner, CPCU
Vice-President, FM Global

William Payton
Director of Risk and Insurance Management, University of Missouri

Jeanne M. Drewes
Assistant Director for Access and Preservation, Michigan State University Libraries

This practical and informative resource guides librarians, directors, trustees, facility managers, and business officers to select the best path to protect the library's assets. Users will gain an essential understanding of the importance of risk management in preventing loss from actions ranging from natural disasters to vandalism and terrorism. The Manual contains sample policies and checklists that can be used to craft the best protection for all types of libraries.

TABLE OF CONTENTS
Preface
Introduction
Chapter 1: A Risk Management Philosophy for Libraries
Chapter 2: Risk Identification
Chapter 3: Risk Quantification and Evaluation
Chapter 4: Loss Prevention
Chapter 5: Risk Financing
Chapter 6: Risk Financing – Insurance
Chapter 7: New Construction
Chapter 8: Claims
Bibliography
Appendix A Risk and Insurance Management Resources
Appendix B Sample Risk and Insurance Management Policy
Appendix C Suggested Guidelines in Museum Security
Appendix D Property Loss Prevention Checklist
Appendix E Library Safety Inspection Checklist
Appendix F Contingency Planning for Natural Disasters
Appendix G Sample Request for Proposal Insurance Brokerage Services
About the Authors
Index

Publisher: Library Administration & Management Association, a division of ALA
Publication Date: June 15, 2005
ISBN: 0 8389 8325 1; paperback
Pages: 132 pp. with Index
Price: \$40.00
ALA Member Price: \$36.00
Categories: Administration and Management—Buildings and Facilities

Order from the ALA Store!
www.alastore.ala.org
or phone: 1-866-Shop ALA