Beagle, Donald R. **The Information Commons Handbook.** New York, NY: Neal-Schuman Publishers, 2006. 247 p. $125 USD. ISBN 1-55570-562-6. ∞

The Information Commons Handbook by Donald Robert Beagle is much more than a guide to developing a Commons in your library, rather it's a guide that will assist you in positioning your library to take advantage of collaboration, technology, and educational movements. Beagle, along with contributors Donald Russell Bailey and Barbara Tierney, provides a resourceful and sample rich handbook that will take you step by step from defining the concept of an Information/Learning Commons, to developing strategic and tactical plans, through to the implementation process. The usefulness of this handbook is in its versatility. The processes and tools presented may be applied in small to large libraries, in a variety of library settings (university, college, high school, and public), on a range of budgets, and at various stages of development.

The concept of a Commons (whether an Information, Learning, Reference, Computer, Knowledge, or other type of Commons) is relatively new, yet has gained widespread interest amongst librarians and educational institutions. Substantial increases in the number of electronic resources, a never-ending stream of new technologies, competing information markets, changes in educational models, and decreases in usage of traditional library services, are just a few of the reasons why librarians are moving to redesign library spaces. SPEC Kit 281: The Information Commons, by Leslie Haas and Jan Robertson, presents the results of a 2004 survey on information commons in ARL libraries. The survey results include information on how Information Commons were implemented, and documentation from various ARL libraries utilized in the implementation of their commons. Beagle takes this a step (or multiple steps) further and provides context, theory, guidance in building surveys, strategies for planning and project management, pitfalls to avoid, and much more.

The Information Commons Handbook is a well-organized and thoroughly researched volume in three parts. The first part discusses Beagle's models for understanding the Information Commons concept, including historical context, linkages to the Information Literacy movement, and how the Information Commons is a stepping stone to a Learning Commons. The second part describes the processes and tools needed for strategic and tactical planning with a great number of examples from various institutions that have gone through the process. The third part includes a chapter on special considerations for public libraries when considering the building of an Information Commons. Another chapter covers the utility of an implementation team and various project management tools and techniques. The final chapters provide guidance with developing assessment tools and designing public policies. The text includes a large number of figures, placing the discussions in context of real-life examples. In addition, the book comes with a CD-ROM compiled by Barbara Tierney and containing ten success stories from a range of libraries that implemented an Information Commons.

An Information Commons is a product of many integrated factors, individual to each institution, which makes it difficult to present a single description. Beagle uses a model based on three levels of commons (physical, virtual, cultural) and four types of

resources (human, physical, digital, and social). Depending on the depth and pervasiveness of change, Beagle describes an evolving path of development from Information Commons to Learning Commons. This text promotes the use of strategic planning for libraries and provides a five step Information Commons planning template. For each step, detailed descriptions and instruments are provided with concrete examples of application. Admittedly, the text provides more examples than necessary, but this function is to provide readers with the ability to pick and choose suitable examples for their institution. It further addresses such issues as setting the pace for planning an Information Commons and working within the framework of the organizational culture of the institution, acknowledging that these can be different for each institution.

The discussions in this text are centered on academic institutions, but the inclusion of a chapter dedicated to considerations for Information Commons in public libraries provides an additional perspective. Issues considered in this chapter include a historical overview of public library service in relationship to the development of Information Commons, a discussion of geodemographics, a case study discussing the Charleston Project and their use of GIS to understand their population demographics, and a discussion on effectively matching constituencies and resources. The CD-ROM contains an elaborate description of the Toronto Public Library's Information Commons.

This book is recommended for library administrators, librarians (academic, school, and public), faculty, and teachers interested in realizing a new service model for their library, or building on their current Information Commons. Even if your library is currently not in the position to take on a development of this nature, The Information Commons Handbook will provide essential strategies to get your library ready for when that time comes.

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