

Association of Research Libraries

<http://www.arl.org/rtl/plan/scenarios/usersguide/index.shtml>

Envisioning Research Library Futures: A Scenario Thinking Project

ARL 2030 Scenarios: A User's Guide for Research Libraries

When ARL launched its scenario planning project, "Envisioning Research Library Futures: A Scenario Thinking Project," in the early spring of 2010, it set out to design a set of scenarios that could serve as a resource for any member library to use to enhance its strategic planning process and to foster organizational alignment around change. Developing a scenario set is not enough, however. ARL also determined that the project needed to engage in a variety of activities to help members learn about scenario planning and determine how best to use the scenarios to meet their own organizational objectives. This user's guide, including the ARL 2030 Scenario, is designed to be a key resource supporting members' application of scenario planning.

This user's guide was developed to advance local planning at ARL member libraries. It is written for library leaders broadly defined and for anyone leading or contributing to research library planning processes. You do not need advanced facilitation skills to benefit from this guide, but facilitators charged with supporting scenario planning will find the detailed designs particularly helpful. For leaders, planners, and facilitators alike, the user guide introduces the ARL 2030 Scenarios and explains many of the ways you can strengthen your institution's planning using the ARL 2030 Scenarios.

How to Use This Guide

After reviewing the introduction, it is important to take the time to read the full scenario set carefully. "Scenarios" is a term that is often used in a vernacular sense. The ARL 2030 Scenarios are rich descriptions of four possible futures. Each presents a particular exploration of many critical uncertainties in a way that considers the dynamics that might unfold over a twenty-year time frame, as well as synergies and interactions between uncertainties. As a set, the four scenarios are designed to tell widely divergent stories to explore a broad range of possible developments over time.

The goal in using scenarios is not to pick one as more likely or more desirable but to accept that the future will contain elements of all four scenarios. Each scenario in itself, however, offers a chance to engage deeply with particular outcomes that libraries could face. The first page of each scenario offers an overview and highlights important circumstances and dynamics. This is followed by a narrative story that paints a more detailed picture of the situation in 2030 and the circumstances that led to that particular future. To make it easier for users to work with the scenarios as a set and to look at how critical uncertainties vary across the four, the end state table provides a relatively compact guide and reference.

When you read the scenarios you will notice that there are four futures described,

but libraries are not explicitly described in any of those futures. Scenarios created for use in scenario planning intentionally leave the organizations that are planning out of the picture. This allows the organization to better focus on the main forces that are shaping the environment around it. Thus, each scenario has a blank where the library can fill itself in through the planning process. It is assumed that in each future research libraries exist in some form.

This approach means that other kinds of organizations might also find blanks that they can explore through a scenario planning process. ARL can consider its future as an association using these scenarios, but other kinds of libraries, other actors in the research enterprise, or other participants in the scholarly communication system could find value in using this scenario set and the user's guide.

Once you are familiar with the ARL 2030 Scenarios, you are in a position to review the strategic implications that were identified through the ARL scenario project. These are intended as a starting point and model rather than a comprehensive identification of strategic implications implicit in the scenarios. With this understanding of the scenario material, you will be ready to browse through the information on mapping out an institutional process and read the descriptions of different strategies for applying the ARL 2030 Scenarios to planning in your organization. Each ARL member is unique. The guide is designed to provide a good range of ideas and resources from which member libraries can choose in deciding what best meets their individual needs.