Managing a Successful Library Design and Furnishing Project

Compiled by Demco Interiors for Designing Libraries

This Essential Design Guideline is a brief guide to successfully managing the process of planning and implementing a new or refurbished library interior. We give practical advice and tips based on our experience and observations gained from designing libraries and learning environments for over thirty years.

Designing libraries has become much more complex over recent years with the introduction of shared services, self-service, merchandising and e-books, so the scope for designing a library space is much broader and needs to take a strategic, collaborative approach.

A successful outcome for any project depends on sound detailed planning and consultation at the early stages and then adhering to these plans. The project team must also be willing to learn, or at least understand new skills such as reading plans and scale; interpreting drawings; producing and distributing relevant meeting notes; scheduling timeline meetings and communicating across sometimes multiplatform channels. The more you know now, the more you will be able to stay in control later. Your library designer will be happy to help

you with all these details – take the opportunity of learning from their experience.

Before the design brief

The team

Forming your team is key. Each team member should:

- Know the project objectives;
- Be aware of his/her responsibilities within the team;
- Understand the limit or range of these responsibilities;
- Understand the commitment required e.g. time, meetings, visits;
- Have clear expectations of their role;
- Be introduced to contractors and suppliers and any consultants.

In a small project e.g. a school library, you may only be a team of 'one', so you will need to be clear on who you will be reporting to; who (however informally) will be your support and how often you will need to update key people.

On larger projects there should be a dedicated project team in place which will include your external library design company, contractor

team and architects. There may well be many other stakeholders involved in the project so it is important to determine from the very beginning who is responsible for what.

Finally, avoid your plans being blocked later because you have failed to consult, inform or at least influence a person with the 'power of sign off.'

Budget Planning

The success of the project depends very much on understanding who controls the budget, how it can be spent and on what.

If you need to build the budget, as part of your team's remit, remember that many suppliers will help you with estimating costs. They have the experience and will be able to advise on likely inflation; 'hidden' costs you may not have considered; trends that may influence cost and future proofing.

Be aware of the relationship between the building of the budget and the development of the design brief.

If you or even another department holds (i.e. has authority to spend) the budget, **your planning and managing starts here.** Guard against running ahead with your design brief. Creating a great design and selecting your furnishings early on can be frustrating and very disappointing if you find out later they do not fit within your internal guidelines. Make every effort to understand your internal procurement processes. Take time to understand and get to know the person (or department) who authorises and/or places the orders. Learn the rules that govern procurement. Only by knowing the procedures will you be able to exert influence as to how money is spent.

Consultation

Consultation and insight will be the foundation on which your design objectives will be based.   Allow time to gain feedback from users; prepare and plan for workshops, surveys and collating all this information. Your library designer will be able to help you with this.

Timing and planning

Prepare – smaller projects can sometimes be more demanding than larger ones. With larger projects you may have a whole support team around you (premises managers, designers, suppliers, contractors, architects, builders,) but on the smaller projects you are pretty much doing it on your own. Careful timing and planning will help reduce stress levels. You may need to consider:

Project planning and timing i.e., the exact sequence of events. These will differ from project to project but may include:

• Book removal and possible off-site storage
• Removal and storage of re-useable items
• Manufacture of bespoke items
• Structural and other works (e.g. electrical, cabling)
• Other contractors (e.g. RFID/self service; decorators; IT)
• Fitting time for new furniture
• Carpeting and carpet fitting
• Snagging
• RFID and self service implementation
• Stocking the library

If your library is part of a larger, shared services project then you will have to integrate planning across the different services, communication is key here.

Creating a timeline (Gantt chart)
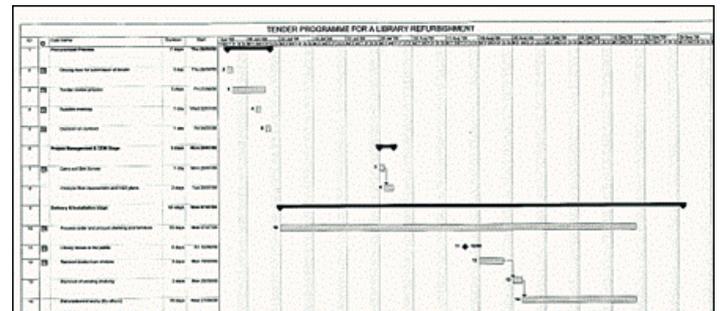
This is a very powerful tool. Other people will not do it for you. You are responsible for meeting that key opening date and now is the time to start exerting control. Include within the timeline all likely landmark events; start with the end (usually the public-opening day); back through stock going on to shelves; signage installed; carpets fitting (essential before furniture arrives!); back to placing the original order. Get advice from experts – remember that the supply chain, especially where specific fabrics or materials are specified, can be long, and it is important to be realistic Any sort of time-planning tool or software will help to keep everyone concerned on track and will keep the team in charge of the project.

"I work backwards from the launch/opening day
I LOOK forward and WORK backwards!"
Meryl Jones, Assistant Head of Library and Heritage Service

Builders, architects, designers and other contractor-suppliers will have their own timelines so it is important to 'stay connected'. Ensure everyone understands what is expected of them and by when. For

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many projects there will be a mix of internal and external contractors – the time plan should take this into account.

Creating the design brief and sticking to it

A first is to know the library user – LMS data will help to identify trends, demographics and usage, plus findings from any consultations / workshops and access to previous data on usage, behaviours and expectations. The proposition in 'see yourself as others see us' is a good starting point to overcome negatives and build on positives. Local communities, heritage groups and neighbourhood groups will want to have their say and considering the wider views when preparing the design brief can reap dividends later.

"It was a significant challenge to get the amount of shelving needed for all the stock, allow space for furniture and circulation but the finished result more than exceeds our expectations. The excellent design really complements the building and throughout the project Demco had a good eye for detail. In the Kent History and Library Centre we have a building we can all be proud of".
James Pearson, KCC Project Manager, Libraries, Registration & Archives

Key principles of the design brief:

- A written document with accredited authors (who and when it was written).
- Sets out aims and objectives of the project and records expected outcomes.
- Acts as a specification for third parties.
- A referral point for everyone involved in the project.
- Avoids duplicated effort.
- Records basic strategic decisions
- Must be an agreed document by all on the project team and senior management if not part of that team – SHARE THE BRIEF.

Design brief content (1): You may want to consider some of these headings for your design brief:

- Hard data – stock levels, occupancy rates
- Project plan – dates, responsibilities, contractor details
- State fixed and flexible thinking
- Style, look and feel for the new library
- Stock policy if it affects layout issues
- Services points (their purpose and function)
- Seating (types, style, purpose)
- Accessibility
- Security including RFID self-issue/return machines
- Cafe - what are the implications of providing catering; to what level is provision required?
- Consultant's appointment – what outside help you may need and possible fees; what skills are not available within your team – for example creating scale plans
- General information and drawings
- Declare the budget – consider whether the money available is declared within a tender document or in briefing documents to potential suppliers

"Supplier websites are a great source of information that you can use when preparing your initial design brief. We are always happy to provide specs, literature, samples and arrange visits to other libraries or to our showroom."
Andy Parker, Sales and Marketing Director, Demco Interiors

The Team – internal and external

Your internal team

Consider the potential demands of the project, and if in-house skills can meet those demands. Stay in control. Record meetings. **TIP**: a digital recorder leaves you free to concentrate on what is being said, rather than having to write everything down and you can store digital files for future reference.

Other professionals, e.g. architects will keep comprehensive records of meetings – so should you, and review these notes before subsequent meetings

External

Main Contractors

Understand the role of the main contractor. If the order for internal furnishings is being placed by the contractor it is essential they are kept in the loop.   Understanding their role in relation to the project is key. Dealing with large companies can be intimidating – don't be bullied!

Architects

Understand the role of the architect and develop the relationship. Learn from their skills and abilities but without losing sight of your own professional skills and your knowledge of your end users and their requirements. Draw on the consultation work you have done.

The library designer

Include your library designer / furnishings supplier from start to finish. With their experience they will be a useful resource for you and will expect to take on a consultancy role. They can, and will, be happy, to help you with you planning and consultation work, timings, budget, layouts and drawings. Also remember that suppliers have a wealth of experience in designing libraries so can give you a lot of support. They will explain any architect's plans, designs and layouts to you.

Ask if they would be happy to give your team a workshop on topics such as:
- Understanding the plans
- Scale – how the space will work
- Colour schemes
- Details such as elevations, isometrics, drawing protocol

Use resources – showrooms, workshops, visits to other libraries.

Understanding, checking and evaluate quotations:

Once quotations for designs and furnishings come in you and your team will need to assess them across some of the following criteria:

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- Does the quote correspond to the layout plan?
- Do the quote and plan correspond to the design brief?
- Verify the specification (literature, visuals etc)
- Check quantities and arithmetic
- Read terms and conditions (i.e. the terms under which the supplier will trade with you – for example when they will expect payment)
- Compare proposals to ensure best value

Check, check and check again – don't make assumptions you must check every word.

Consultation

Adopt the principle of 'stop telling and start listening'. Consultation at the start and throughout the design process is important to ensure that you are designing the library based on genuine feedback and not just making assumptions.

You can carry out the consultations yourself or look for an external supplier who has experience of planning and implementing research projects. You may find that one of your suppliers or contractors offers the service as an add-on to their core services.

The principles behind consultation:
- Engaging stakeholders in the design process
- Listening to end users through creative workshops
- Working with library teams, partners and library users
- Fulfilling the consultation process to meet funding requirements
- Analysis and feedback for actionable conclusions
- Creating a relevant library interior, based on feedback

Additional Resources:
www.demcointeriors.co.uk

Co-creation workshops

A more modern approach to designing libraries is to adopt a co-creation approach. This calls for the input of specially selected groups of people to develop insights that then fuel interior designs, layout and new product development. Co-creation can bring a radically different perspective to the design process and your library designer will be able to use the co-creation process to produce 3D visualisations, sketch-ups and walkthroughs.

Learning from others

One of the best ways of approaching your library design project is to learn from others. Your library designer will have a wealth of case studies they can show you and will be happy to take you for visits to other projects. Other libraries are always happy to talk about their experiences and supplier websites will be a very useful source of information. Keep up to date with current trends and research to gain a better understanding of expectations; from self-service to merchandising to flexible spaces. Websites such as Designing Libraries are an excellent one-stop source for design specific topics.