## Victoria Harriston at the National Academies:
## Collaboration and Knowledge-Sharing are the Key Drivers to Success

When Victoria Harriston is asked about what works at the George E. Brown, Jr. Library of the National Academies in Washington, DC, she doesn't hesitate to respond. In fact, her response comes so quickly and with so much self-assurance that it is clear that her approach to knowledge services delivery brings specific and tangible results to the famous institution where she is employed, and she is proud of that. This is a knowledge services manager who invests considerable energy in thinking about how valuable knowledge services are to the library's users, and how important it is to build on that success.

"I want to embed library services in every part of the organization," she says. "That's my goal. And I particularly want knowledge services—provided through the library—to be a critical component in the high-profile parts of the organization. I want the library staff to partner and collaborate everywhere we're needed. That's the strategic direction I've chosen, and it's what I'm trying to bring to the National Academies."

The keys to Harriston's success are easy to spot. Collaboration is critical, and Harriston defines collaboration broadly, because it is obvious that the library's audience, the people to whom its services are targeted, is a broad one. Created by Congress in 1863 to serve as science advisors to the federal government, the National Academy of Sciences eventually grew to include the National Research Council in 1916, the National Academy of Engineering in 1964, and the Institute of Medicine in 1970. These organizations today make up what is known as the National Academies, so the library's clientele naturally includes the National Academies members, particularly in their roles as members of the organization's various and numerous committees.

In practice, however, the library's primary users are staff members, conducting research to support the institution's many program studies. More than 200 reports are published each year, and several hundred projects might be in various stages of development at any given time. Additionally, a number of so-called "fast-track" program studies, expected to be completed in a short period of time, are undertaken at the National Academies, and the library is a key player for that undertaking as well. When these two established markets combine with the library's public role—the library is open to the public by appointment, for research and reference—its service sphere is noticeably wide-ranging, and it is Harriston's plan to ensure that the institution-wide (and, as noted, to a limited degree the public) research management picture is served as well as it can be served.

So it turns out that, with such an unusual arrangement, the George E. Brown Jr. Library is required to operate both as an academic library and as a specialized research library such as those found in large sci-tech research organizations in both the commercial world and in the nonprofit world. The knowledge services picture for such organizations, as is now well established, requires and indeed builds on a particular and highly specialized type of leadership, one that focuses on, above all else, collaboration. For Harriston, that leadership role calls into play three levels of collaboration, collaboration with users, as they pursue their own research management goals; a second type of collaboration with users, in which the library's customers are included in determining what knowledge services should be provided, through the use of extensive outreach and user surveys; and of course an important set of collaborative activities in which the library's knowledge services professionals join in with the larger organizational effort, as the institution's leaders seek to achieve the organizational mission.

In the first, in establishing a collaborative relationship with the library's customers, one of Harriston's best examples is an activity she has designated the Library Liaison Program.

"Certainly our Library Liaisons work closely with specific program divisions," she says. "It is an arrangement in which a library team member works with the division to provide advanced-level research

and research consulting services. But there is more to it than that. We have a bigger ambition, for we are seeking to establish a close working relationship with our research divisions."

And how does that play out?

"Very well," Harriston says, and the look on her face tells the listener that the success of this particular effort is a source of considerable satisfaction.

"Our liaisons work proactively, regularly attending program division staff meetings, where they may have the opportunity to speak briefly about specific knowledge resources or simply to learn about ongoing research activities within the division and inform everyone of who they are and how they support the division. In establishing these close working relationships with the program divisions, our liaisons have moved into other knowledge-focused activities, such as designing and conducting educational sessions about specific knowledge resources, providing subject-focused current news alerts, utilizing broadcast emails for improved marketing of library services to the divisions. And one of the most rewarding activities to grow out of the Library Liaison Programs has been organizing and hosting Brain Bag events for the Institute of Medicine division. For each Brain Bag event the library invites a speaker to discuss a National Academies report. Brain Bags attendance is open to everyone in the organization as well as the public. Obviously, these Brain Bag events build cooperation and socialization among division boards, but more important, they encourage greater awareness of research activities across all divisions and, not coincidentally, encourage knowledge sharing within the organization."

Another area in which the collaborative effort has paid off handsomely is with interlibrary loan and document delivery services. At the National Academies, these library services make up a critical element in the organization's study process, especially that having to do with information gathering, a finding that comes out in every user study—formal or informal—the library conducts. The wide range of topics studied by the program committees requires substantial reviews of scientific literature, and for the library to effectively contribute to this element of the study process, Harriston and her team heard what the customers had to say. As a result, she has instituted a "sense of urgency" requirement for all interlibrary loan and document delivery service requests.

"Each ILL/DD request is deadline-driven," she says, "and this means that at least 50 per cent of service requests must be filled in 0-2 days. We are able to meet this goal by using an automated approach to manage service requests, participating in several resource-sharing consortia, and providing more self-service, un-mediated document delivery. And a pleasant surprise recently came up when our statistics showed that we have now reached a 50 per cent same-day delivery result. We're very proud of this milestone, and even though it might not be maintained forever, it's certainly what we want to be doing, pushing our 'acceptable' standard of service delivery higher and higher."

That level of collaboration between the library and its users of course influences how knowledge services delivery is managed at the Academies, and Harriston and her staff are not at all nervous about going to the customers to get their feedback. And why should they be? They have set up a wide-ranging outreach program, and their customer surveys provide them with critically important results for determining how the library is to be managed and what services are to be provided. And as for the quality of knowledge services provided, they get the message that they are doing a good job, and the most recent customer survey provided the National Academies management with a pretty impressive list of strengths. In fact, this particular library "report card" demonstrated that, as far as for the library's customer base is concerned, 76% of those responding reported that the effectiveness of library services in finding work-related information is "excellent" or "very good." A happy finding, indeed.

There is, of course, that other area of collaboration that must be given attention. In any organization, enterprise-wide cooperation, knowledge-sharing, and teamwork are not only required, they are now the norm for the successful achievement of the organizational mission. The situation at the National Academies is no exception. As enterprise leaders seek to establish what needs to be done to keep the information/knowledge/strategic learning wheels turning, it is not surprising that the library's knowledge

services professionals participate. A recent example is the library's role in the organization's web development planning. The National Academies' Office of Communications includes an activity called the Enterprise for Publishing and Outreach using Web Resources (EPOWR) and the library was invited to work with the group. EPOWR's mission is to help the National Academies use the web to enable more effective communication with the many audiences that make up the National Academies' public, focusing on enhancing outreach, cementing brand identity, maximizing communication, creating new means of promotion, and expanding the public presence and influence of the National Academies.

Harriston notes that, as part of this group, "the library has collaborated with the Division Web Coordinators to design customized websites, tailoring library resources based on specific areas of research relevant to the division. Our collaboration with the DWCs (Division Web Coordinators) creates greater customer awareness of the library's knowledge resources and establishes new learning opportunities, thus supporting that strategic goal I was speaking about earlier, to embed library services within the primary program divisions of the organization. Additionally, our work with the DWCs contributes to the goal of elevating the perception of library services and the professional expertise of the library staff for executive management stakeholders and library advocates."

The specifics of the approach call for each program's DWC to post links from their own sites to the library's public website, which has in turned helped the library generate public awareness and encouraged more library use.

"At the same time," Harriston notes, "we have realized greater exposure and use of our online catalog, particularly by international visitors to our website. This particular collaboration is turning out to be a win-win situation for all of us."

For any specialized research library or knowledge center, collaboration also includes outreach, playing the advocacy game. Managers of these units have long recognized and understood that no research operation can go it alone, and that is especially true in the specialized research community. When it comes time to review support for the larger organization, research allocation authority (read: senior management) is often tempted to question the ROI on internal research support. Unless, as Victoria Harriston puts it, "the knowledge services professionals are out there, participating in every program planning meeting they can, making sure that they have identified and targeted appropriate collaborators and are partnering with key leaders in the organization. It is critical for the library to work outside itself, to get out into the organization."

That kind of collaboration leads to or, more precisely, connects naturally *into* knowledge-sharing and the knowledge-development/knowledge-sharing (KD/KS) concept, the essential and critical attribute of knowledge services that is the underlying foundation of knowledge services delivery. What Harriston and her team of information professionals are doing at the National Academies library is of course converging information management and knowledge management into a workable whole for the support of the institution's research management efforts. Where their success really becomes apparent, though, is in the unique connection they make between knowledge-sharing and strategic, performance-centered learning.

For Harriston, training is one of the essential tools for awareness-raising, for moving outside the library, and she has taken up the strategic, performance-centered learning "piece" of knowledge services with considerable enthusiasm. To that end, she has even created a new staff position, Research and Training Services Coordinator, a dedicated professional role to ensure that the benefits of strategic learning are firmly established as part of the library's ongoing knowledge services delivery process.

"I created the position for two reasons," Harriston says. "The first was to reorganize library staffing and create a professional career path within the library. It's a challenge for all managers, to ensure that our best people are given a level of work to perform that matches their professional growth and development as they move on with their careers. Secondly, though, I needed to give greater focus and attention to the library's training program and the partnership that we had established with the organization's Staff Development Programs in the NRC Executive Office, a program created to help provide the National Academies

employees opportunities to grow professionally. As a result of this partnership the library training program has flourished. We have continually increased attendance at workshops, and the enterprise-wide staff development programs now include attention to library services as part of the organization's weekly New Employee Orientation program. Additionally, we are currently working with the National Academies Staff Development Programs Office in an E-Learning initiative for developing computer-based training modules."

There have been other library-focused training successes as well, and one of the most spectacular has been the involvement of the Research and Training Services Coordinator in all orientation sessions for the Christine Mirzayan Science & Technology Policy Graduate Fellowship Program of the National Academies. This is a high-profile program designed to engage graduate science, engineering, medical, veterinary, business, and law students in the analysis that informs the creation of science and technology policy and to familiarize them with the interactions of science, technology, and government. While many organizations have internship/fellowship programs, not many of them give attention to knowledge services when those interns and fellows come to the job. That's not the case at the National Academies, where each orientation session includes a 45-minute in-depth overview of library services. It is an unusual arrangement indeed, and it has paid off in a noticeably increased awareness among fellows and interns about the services that are available to them through the library.

It is not only through training that collaboration moves into knowledge-sharing. Harriston has found other avenues, situations that she likes because, as she sees it, they provide just one more opportunity for going beyond the *usual* concept of library services.

"I am constantly exploring new opportunities where the professional expertise of library staff can be used to further the mission of the organization," she says. "Most recently I was invited by our National Academies Press to help market their new Women's Adventures in Science book series to school libraries, and it is a role I'm very excited about. This is not the typical or, shall we say, 'expected' role for a research library, but why not? We are expected to contribute to the sharing of knowledge in the organization, even to lead in that knowledge-sharing function, so it makes sense for us to bring the expertise and connections of librarianship to the aid of another unit that is engaged in a different kind of knowledge sharing. That's what collaboration is all about, isn't it?"

It sounds almost too good to be true, this quality of knowledge services delivery at the National Academies, but there's no doubt but that Victoria Harriston and her team, her advisors, and her management are doing good work. But it's certainly not all a bed of roses, either. There are challenges, and when asked what she worries about, what keeps her up at night, Harriston does not dissemble.

"We've got to learn to do more with less," she says. "As library budgets generally remain flat, we must develop strategies that will encourage greater incorporation of library services within program divisions, which will continue to build more partnerships and collaborations across the organization. We have to demonstrate greater ROI to our stakeholders. We have to develop strategies that will advance the profile of the library as a business unit within the organization, and, finally, we must explore and build new strategic learning opportunities both within and outside of the organization that will continue to improve the perception of library services by our stakeholders. And these aren't battles we're going to win all at once, but there is no doubt about it: if we're thinking about these things, and we're getting other people to think about them, the knowledge services picture at the National Academies is not at all bleak."

Not at all. With people like Victoria Harriston at the helm, it's just the opposite. The delivery of knowledge services is good, and it is getting better all the time. So that picture is not just the *opposite* of bleak. At this rate, the future for knowledge services delivery at the National Academies looks positively bright.