from the editor

By Catherine A. Lemmer

The “E”s of 2015

ew year’s resolutions don’t usually enter my mind until February 1, in part because I am still closing out the previous year with an annual performance review that is due on January 31. Now, in the midst of the shortest month of the year, the pressure is on to evaluate and settle on concrete goals for 2015.

There are a lot of “e” words floating around in the year-end management and financial planning literature. My 2015 goal exercise starts at the juncture of expectations and economics. Our users, whether they are clients, attorneys, students, faculty, researchers, or the woman on the street, don’t sit still. Despite our declining resources, our users keep coming to us with demands for new, different, and better solutions for their business and legal needs. In such circumstances it is often simply easier to prefer economics over expectations.

So how do we ensure our users’ expectations remain the priority? Efficiency is the other “e” word one hears most about on the economics side of the expectations/economics relationship. Efficiency means doing something right. In today’s environment, efficiency translates into doing something right with less funding. However, a focus on efficiency oft ignores another very important “e” word—effective. Being effective is about doing the right thing, which is a long way from doing something right. Being effective means meeting our users’ expectations. We need to remind our stakeholders that doing the right thing is ultimately more efficient and fiscally responsible.

How do we convince our stakeholders that a focus on expectations is, in the end, about economics? It is first necessary to understand that meeting expectations is not blind adherence to current materials, practices, procedures, or even staffing. Part of my 2015 focus on expectations over economics will be systematically reviewing the library’s processes, procedures, and staffing to make sure that each is still meaningful, that it is effective as it relates to our users. A willingness to evaluate and, if necessary, cease certain materials and actions buys you good faith with your stakeholders. It shows that you are indeed focused on doing what is most effective to meet your users’ expectations and not holding ground for the sake of holding ground.

It is also important to understand that meeting expectations will involve difficult conversations about managing users. Now is the time to develop knowledgeable alternatives, educate your users, and, in some cases, simply be candid about what can and cannot be done. Ironically, this will often be harder than evaluating current practices and procedures. In the end, I hope to conclude 2015 with satisfied and knowledgeable users who value our law library.

Expertise is another relevant “e” word for 2015. Responding effectively to users’ expectations will likely have you retooling your team to respond to new and different needs. In addition, no one person in the library can be the resident expert on every aspect of the library. However, each individual must be knowledgeable about current and future trends to be an effective part of the library team. The 2015 AALL Annual Conference in Philadelphia is a perfect opportunity, whether your library team needs new skills or a refresher on current and emerging trends. I am already eyeing the conference offerings with these thoughts in mind.

Energy is yet another “e” word for 2015—as in being positive in the face of constant change and as in the stamina to both continue to value user expectations over economics and to develop new skills to meet those expectations when it might be easier to do otherwise. As law librarians and information professionals, we are lucky that our shared professional energy is both supportive and, when needed, the push to get one moving forward. It is why I believe that energy is ultimately our most important “e” for 2015.