

MEMORANDUM
Placer County Library
County of Placer

TO: Honorable Board of Supervisors

FROM: Mary George, Director of Library Services
Andy Heath, Deputy County Executive Officer

DATE: December 10, 2013

SUBJECT: Approve the final draft of the Library Strategic Plan

ACTION REQUESTED

Approve the final draft of the Library Strategic Plan including the framework strategies and initiatives.

BACKGROUND

In 2011, a new strategic direction was sought by Library Administration to assist in evaluating Library resources and to guide the deployment of future services. The economic downturn and loss of property tax revenues which is the major funding source for the Library, made it difficult for Library Administration to plan future services, anticipate staffing needs, react to local trends in Library use, and meet the expectations of Library customers. It was in this environment that Library Administration sought and was competitively awarded a Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) federal grant, administered by the California State Library, to provide the funding to conduct a community needs assessment and develop a community driven plan of action.

The Library Strategic Plan is derived from interactive discussion in community workshops and through surveys with more than 500 community leaders and Placer County constituents. Participants included members from the Literacy Support Council, the Friends of the Library, and representatives from other Placer County departments. By reaching out to residents and asking them to share their aspirations and expectations for themselves, their families, and their community, the Library was able to capture the strategies and initiatives necessary to help meet community expectations of future Library programs and services.

The Library asked participants what would enhance the Library a vital community resource. Findings included:

- Beautiful, clean, and inviting locations
- Updated technology
- Large, diverse collections
- Improved access to e-books
- A vibrant, modern website
- More community events, especially for adults
- A hub for the community; a "go to place"

Keeping these recommendations and many more in mind, the Plan will serve as a flexible roadmap and will assist Library Administration in allocating resources in the most effective manner; with the needs of the community in the forefront of budget discussions.

The initiatives and strategies in the Plan will also be nimble enough to adjust to a fluctuating revenue stream. The Strategic Plan is not meant to be fiscal in nature or be a check list of things to get done, but a flexible framework. Using this framework the Library can anticipate, in a timely manner, the rapidly changing landscape of modern libraries and how Placer County citizens use them. The Plan identifies trends in Librarianship and seeks to connect those trends with local need, expectation, and ultimately Library services; one budget year at a time.

In November 2012, your Board received an update from the Library's consultant on the draft strategies and initiatives. The three main initiatives have not changed from the draft to the final plan presented today:

- Reverse the Erosion in Library Services by recognizing that, like many County departments, the Library was hit hard by the Great Recession and must invest as the economy improves in the facilities, collection, staffing, and programming in order to meet the expectations of savvy Library customers. To remain viable, the Library must move beyond the interconnected system of "small" town libraries to a fully interdependent network, sharing and concentrating resources and services where customers are using them.
- Modernize Operations to Improve Efficiency and Expand Services by anticipating the needs of Library users, reducing the unit cost of routine customer transactions, improving the Library's website content and access, and making self-service easy, fun, and preferred by customers.
- Building Capacity for the Future by identifying new revenue sources and building prudent reserves.

The Library is already looking at ways to support the initiatives and strategies including consolidating Library technology services with County IT and working with the Friends of the Library and the Placer Community Foundation to increase revenues through planned giving.

Furthermore, as a means to consider future implementation of key initiatives identified in the Library Strategic Plan, the Library Department, working closely with the County Executive Office, has analyzed the Library's fiscal and budgetary characteristics and constraints over the last several years. This analysis was completed to provide a framework promoting fiscal sustainability as elements of the Library Strategic Plan are considered and ultimately implemented via annual work plans developed in the years to come.

ANALYSIS

Library Revenue Sources

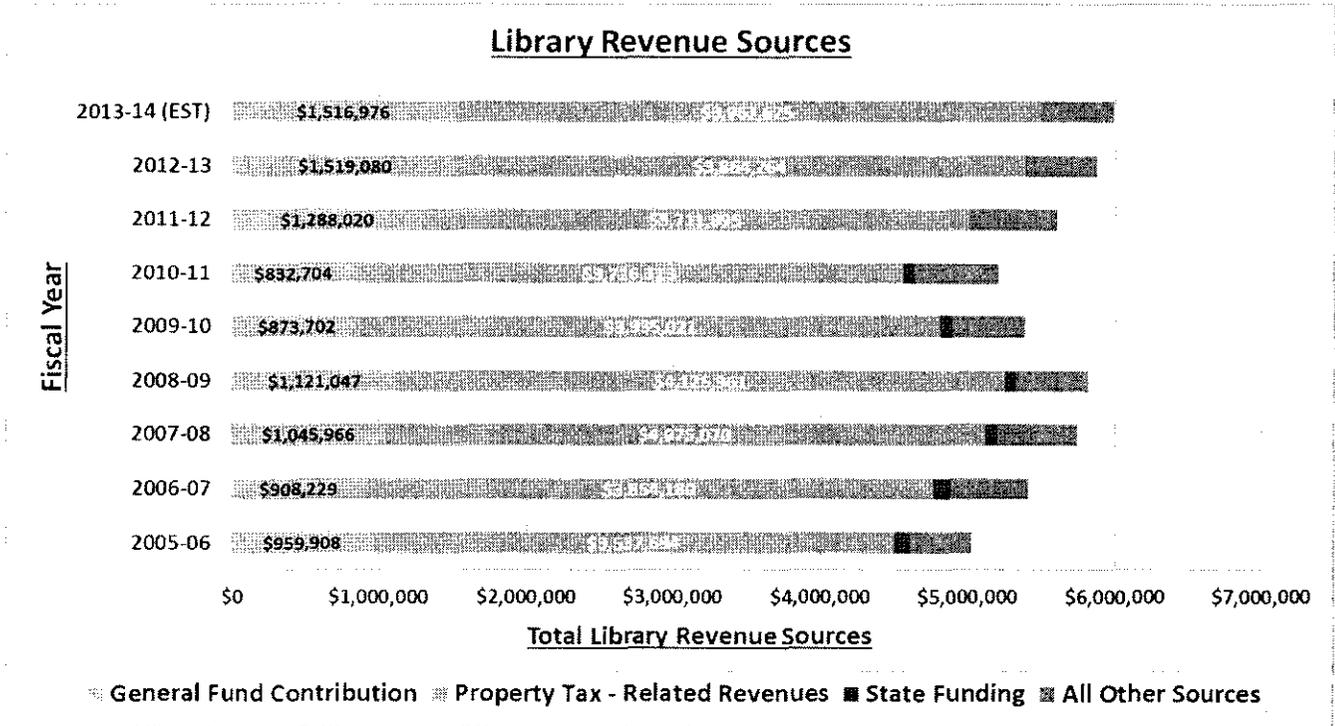
Historically, the single largest source of funding for the Library Program has been through the collection of property tax. Over the last nine years, property tax revenues have comprised between 66.2% and 73.1% of total revenue collections. Revenue sources making up the balance of Library Program sources include the following:

County General Fund Contribution – Covers Librarian salary / benefits; and majority of costs allocated through the County’s A-87 Plan

Funding from State of California - Funding assistance from state ceased after FY 2010-11

Other revenue sources - Includes fines, grants, donations, law library, etc.

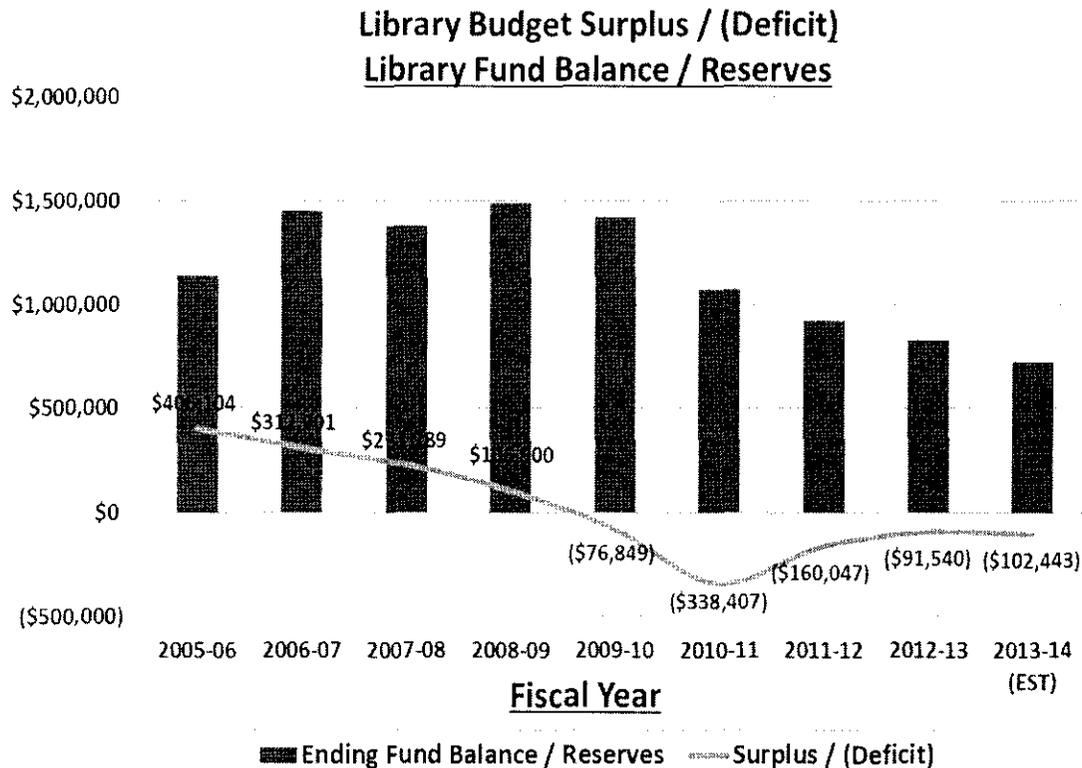
The table below shows collections of Library revenue sources since FY 2005-06:



As demonstrated by the chart above, declining property values stemming from the housing crisis and the onset of the “Great Recession” in late 2008 triggered a three year succession of decreases in property tax collections, from a high of \$4.13 million in FY 2008-09 to a low of \$3.71 million in FY 2011-12. This represents a 10.0% decrease in the Library Programs single largest source of annual revenue.

The second largest source of funding to the Library Program is an annual contribution from the County’s General Fund, which serves to fund annual salary and benefit-related costs for the County Librarian as mandated by the State; and all but \$100,000 in costs allocated to the Library Program through the A-87 cost plan (current practice). As indicated by the revenue chart above, General Fund contributions to the Library Program have fluctuated over time, however, increased significantly in FY 2011-12, primarily due to higher A-87 costs associated with the addition of the Rocklin Library.

Lower collections of property taxes, the loss of State funding after FY 2010-11, and the fact that the General Fund contribution to the Library Program only serves to offset salary costs for the County Librarian and a portion of A-87 charges, has resulted in Library Fund operating deficits since FY 2009-10, necessitating the use of reserves as shown in the table below:



As indicated in the above chart, the Library Program has relied upon using reserves to fund operating deficits for the last five fiscal years (including the deficit estimated for the current year). Operating deficits, although they persist, appear to be stabilizing as the impacts of ongoing expenditure reductions primarily related to staffing and materials purchases; and a modest recovery in property tax revenues experienced over the last two years are realized.

Given the continued operating deficits and as a means to consider future implementation of key initiatives identified in the Library Strategic Plan, the Library Department must evaluate all alternatives towards the development of an annual operating budget that is not reliant upon the use of reserves, and repositions the Library on a path towards fiscal sustainability.

Fiscal Sustainability – Efforts currently underway and options to consider

It is a goal of the Library Department to develop a balanced operating budget for FY 2014-15 that does not rely of the use of reserves, yet begins to implement initiatives as outlined in the Library's recommended Strategic Plan. To this end, the Library is actively engaged in fully analyzing all operations and associated cost drivers with the intention of developing a fiscally sustainable operational model.

As the Library Department begins to prepare its budget for FY 2014-15, staffing models currently in place commensurate with system-wide branch operational costs will also be analyzed. At the present time, the Library has 37 allocated system-wide positions and currently utilizes 40 Extra Help positions to manage the day-to-day operations of eleven Library branches and a Bookmobile. Analysis of staffing levels and the associated costs is expected to include whether redirection and/or consolidation of certain positions may result in increased staffing resource stability to pertinent programs; while ascertaining staffing levels required to strategically and effectively deliver fiscally prudent services to all branches. As a complement to the overall staffing model review, staff will also evaluate costs to operate all branches as a

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means to determine potential savings that might be realized through a reconfigured branch network (magnet library approach) and/or operating hours reduction.

Recently, an operational assessment of the Library's Information Technology (IT) support and management was completed by the Administrative Services Department. As a result of the assessment, the Administrative Services Department recommended implementation and consolidation of best practices at the Library in areas such as staffing, the IT network, licensing, security, disaster recovery, and documentation. Consolidation of technical resources and responsibilities between the Library and Administrative Services (IT) is anticipated to ultimately eliminate duplication of certain services while creating an efficient, scalable model under which the Library can better progress into the future. Full implementation of recommended changes is anticipated to save the Library Program approximately \$15,000 - \$20,000 annually beginning in FY 2015-16.

In addition to the implementation of the IT Assessment recommendations, a comprehensive review of all Library costs allocated through the A-87 Cost Plan is currently being performed. This comprehensive review is being conducted as a means to determine levels of allocated costs necessary to assure the most effective delivery of services to library patrons. Because the majority of A-87 costs are funded via an annual contribution from the General Fund, this review will also result in an evaluation of both the amount of and manner by which future General Fund contributions to the Library take place. The A-87 review will be ongoing as budgets are developed for the 2014-15 fiscal year.

Implementation of the Library's recommended Strategic Plan requires the Library continue making progress towards achieving ongoing fiscal sustainability. Current and anticipated comprehensive reviews of Library cost drivers coupled with a modest recovery in property tax collections are expected to significantly decrease reliance on one-time revenue sources (i.e. fund balance and reserves) to fund ongoing operations, thus promoting fiscal sustainability.

FISCAL IMPACT

No fiscal impact.

Attachment

Placer County Library

Strategic Plan



Board of Supervisor's Meeting

December 10, 2013

Approved by the Library Advisory Board September 18, 2013



November 18, 2013

Board of Supervisors
Placer County
175 Fulweiler Avenue
Auburn, CA 95603

Dear Board members,

It gives me great pleasure to see that the Placer County Library Strategic Plan is to be presented to your Board. This plan represents a great effort by residents in your county to move your library service forward. The California State Library has supported library planning efforts across the State during the recent recession as many libraries faced cutbacks. Local government has been affected at all levels and it is our duty to find ways to continue to emphasize the role of the public library in our communities. The size of this vast state and the diversity of its inhabitants make this a challenging undertaking. I support efforts such as Placer County's that look at local needs and trends rather than try to apply a statewide perspective. Although the task was great, the vision for a future library brought forward many people willing to do what needed to be done. The plan that is presented to you showcases the many fine efforts of the persons and groups that pursued the goals of planning for their Placer County Library.

Congratulations to your Board, the Library Advisory Board, Mary George and staff, and all the residents and community groups that participated in the production of this plan.

Respectfully yours,

Gerald Maginnity
Acting State Librarian of California

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A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR OF LIBRARY SERVICES

It is an exciting and challenging time to be working in Libraries. Technology is transforming the ways in which people relate to information, libraries, themselves, and the world. Some say the era of the library is over, that you can find everything you need on the Internet. If that's true, then why are California libraries being used more than ever? Why does the Placer County Library consistently check out more than 1.3 million items each year and see more than 600,000 people visit annually?

If you haven't been to one of the Placer County Libraries lately, you may be surprised at what you find there. Knowledgeable and creative staff is busy selecting, designing, and presenting new library services and programming for you and your family; free computers and Wi-Fi are available at each branch; and young children still sit in the book stacks reading for hours.

My role as a Library Director is to insure that citizens know what the public library can offer to support their community success; to react to the changing landscape of community needs; and to actively participate in building community, one story at a time. The Placer County Library Strategic Plan affords me that ability by providing a flexible framework to make responsible decisions in a challenging economic landscape.

My gratitude and thanks to the California State Library, Joan Frye Williams, Library Administration, the Placer County Library Advisory Board, all 11 of the Placer County Friends of the Library groups, the Placer County Board of Supervisors, the County Executive Office, and especially to every one of the hardworking, dedicated, and supportive Placer County Library staff who will live and breathe the work in this Plan each day. I look forward to the many interesting conversations and positive endeavors this Plan will yield in the future for our community.

Mary L. George

September 2013

INTRODUCTION

This Placer County Library's Strategic Plan is the product of a Federal Library Services and Technology (LSTA) Grant competitively awarded to the Placer County Library by the California State Library. By funding the grant application, the State Library recognized the importance of developing a strategic vision and roadmap for the Placer County Library's future.

In the LSTA Grant Award, Library Administrative staff emphasized the need for the Library to take a more innovative approach to strategic planning. Therefore, this plan departs from tradition in both process and format. What differentiated The Placer Plan is an effort to use an interactive design process, rather than pre-set service responses, to create a scalable plan that can be sustained in a fluctuating economy. It is not simply a to-do list of library tasks, but a flexible framework that will serve the Library well for years to come, even in a rapidly changing environment. The State Library looks to this project as a potential model for other California libraries, particularly rural libraries. Strategic issues identified as part of Placer County's process will be addressed in the coming year by the state as a whole.

It should be noted that this strategic plan speaks to the needs of residents of the Placer County Library's designated service area, which does not include the communities of Roseville or Lincoln. A review of operations data from these jurisdictions did not identify either cost reductions or service improvements to be derived from consolidation. Nonetheless, the strategy presented here has been developed with an eye to coordination and collaboration with neighboring libraries for the benefit of County residents wherever possible.

This new plan is rooted in a shared vision developed by Library Administration in concert with Library staff, 11 Friends of the Library organizations, the Library Advisory Board, the County Executive Office, and the Placer County Board of Supervisors. To them we owe our thanks.

Joan Frye Williams

July 2013

THE PLANNING PROCESS

The strategic planning process was facilitated by Joan Frye Williams, Library Consultant & Futurist, during 2012-2013. The work consisted of three phases: Community Needs Assessment, Visioning, and Realignment.

Community Needs Assessment

The first planning phase ensured that the people of Placer County had full opportunity to contribute to the Library's strategic planning process. Data gathering included:

- Analysis of published material about County residents, such as Library statistics and Census data.
- Visits to Library facilities and meetings with stakeholder groups such as the Friends of the Library.
- A structured community forum.
- Individual interviews with key informants.
- Self-reported survey results, both hard copy and online.

Visioning

The second planning phase centered on interactive workshops for community leaders and Library staff. These were structured explorations of how the Library can be reimagined to meet residents' needs in the future. Activities included:

- Comparing the Library to other successful service providers and destinations.
- Identifying County (not just Library) issues that cut across disparate constituencies.
- Stimulating innovation and creativity to look beyond what the Library has been to what it can become.

During this phase the consultant also identified important trends that will affect the Library's ability to provide service in the future.

This design work formed the basis of a new service vision for the Placer County Library.

Realignment

The final planning phase called out the actions required to move the Library from its current state towards the new service vision, including changes to existing services and new initiatives.

This work has yielded a flexible, community-driven strategic plan that enables Placer County to:

- Prioritize services that residents really want and need.
- Clarify and communicate the Library's role and value.
- Expend resources efficiently and cost effectively for maximum impact.

- Partner effectively with other organizations to serve shared audiences.
- Make sound decisions, update work plans, and seize strategic opportunities as conditions change.
- Move into the future with confidence.

PLACER COUNTY LIBRARY TODAY

Demand for Library Services

Even in the age of the Internet, demand for Library services in Placer County continues to increase. Library use consistently ranks above the median as compared to other California libraries serving similar sized populations. Approximately 69% of current eligible borrowers hold Placer County Library cards, and circulation data show that the Library attracts borrowers of all ages from all parts of the County.

Circulation – checkout of library materials of all types – has increased in line with population growth. Over the years the range of items borrowed has diversified, with DVDs, e-books, and audio books joining more traditional print books and magazines. The average Placer County Library borrower now enjoys more than 10 items per year. If residents were to buy the more than 1.3 million items they checked out from the Placer County Library in FY 2011-12, they would be looking at an expenditure of more than \$25 million. Sharing this resource really is a bargain.

Total in-person visits to Placer County Library facilities have also steadily increased. Residents come to the Library to do more than find reading materials. In addition to browsing the shelves, they are studying, attending programs, performing job searches, picking up tax forms, using the free wireless local area networks (Wi-Fi), learning to read, and gathering with friends and neighbors.

While in-person visits have moved gradually upward, virtual visits to the Library's web site and online catalog have climbed much more steeply, showing a 39% increase since they were first measured in FY 2007-08. In Placer County, public response to convenient new online library services has been very much "build it and they will come."

The Library has done a good job of responding to this demand, and residents give high marks to the Library as a service provider. However, this focus on direct service has come at a cost. In recent years, as demand increased while revenues held steady, the Library has maintained services by deferring necessary investment in facilities, technology, and materials. This strategy worked well to weather a limited economic downturn, but it cannot continue indefinitely. Quality has begun to erode. To keep pace with current best practices and continue to contribute to the quality of life in Placer County, the Library must modernize.

There is no legal requirement for California libraries to provide specific resource levels. However, the California State Library does take a library's compliance with established guidelines into account when

making grant funding decisions. Compliance with state guidelines has also been mandatory to qualify for state construction bond funding. Countywide, the Library currently falls below established minimum level guidelines in square footage and public access computers. It falls below best practice level guidelines in collection size and seats as well.

Facilities

Library facilities – nine county-owned buildings, one city-owned building, and two leased spaces – are in generally good condition for their age. Space allocation is appropriate, and systems, furnishings, and finishes are adequately maintained. Branch libraries vary considerably in size and amenities, not always in proportion to the population served.

Six of Placer County’s 11 branch libraries are more than 30 years old, with the average age being close to 40. While seven branches have been remodeled at some point in their history, neither their locations nor their basic layouts were chosen with the demands or opportunities of modern library service in mind. As noted, total square footage has not kept pace with increases in population, and the Library does not meet guidelines for square footage or number of reader seats.

Collections

Library collections are well selected and well used, and until recently have been appropriately sized for Placer County’s population. The Library has also begun to diversify into downloadable e-books and audio books. However, new materials purchases have been severely cut in response to the recent budget downturn, and the wait time for high-demand items is increasing. As a result, the quality and quantity of the items in the Library’s collection will continue to decline if this trend cannot be reversed. To remain viable, the Library’s collection must be continually refreshed.

Hours

Library hours are at minimum acceptable levels according to State Library guidelines with at least 20 open hours at every branch location. However, the Library’s available schedule of hours does not meet the local demand for evening and weekend availability, a high priority identified in the needs assessment by the County’s younger residents and working families.

Technology

Technology is a vital component of modern library service and operations. To increase productivity, the Placer County Library has introduced technology-based efficiencies such as self-service machines in the Auburn and Granite Bay Libraries and Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) in the Rocklin Library. Self-service print release stations and PC management system are available in Auburn, Granite Bay, Rocklin, and the Tahoe City Libraries. These technologies streamline handling of everyday tasks and help offset reductions in staff available to assist the public.

Even so, library technology has been difficult to maintain with current staff and support. A recent Library Technology Program Assessment recognized inefficiencies of operation due to duplication of

service, technical resource limitations, and complexity of technologies deployed. As new technologies are introduced, the Library must find ways to supply users and staff with up-to-date devices and sufficient training. In addition, all the equipment including software and hardware must be properly maintained.

Public access computers and Wi-Fi are available in all the Libraries. However, demand for these popular services exceeds current capacity. Wait times for computers have increased, and speed and reception degrades when many people are using the Wi-Fi with their own devices. The more rural communities are subject to slower speeds at all times.

Customer Service

Customer service is friendly and professional. Each remodeled branch has improved productivity by consolidating to a single service point and moving staff from behind the desk to deliver assistance at the point of need. However, requests for assistance are increasing in complexity, and staff is now called upon to train, coach, and consult with customers, many of whom are using new technologies for the first time. The Library needs to develop more pre-packaged instructional materials on high-interest “how to” topics such as applying for jobs online, navigating health care choices created by the Affordable Care Act, and downloading e-books to a variety of new devices.

PATTERNS OF USE

The Placer County Library is still in the process of growing from a collection of small, largely independent rural libraries into a more cohesive countywide agency. Each of the eleven library buildings was originally meant to serve a single community, and to contain all of the library resources that the residents of that community might need. Though ostensibly part of a County system, each branch has functioned as the “town” library of its particular locale.

Over the years these separate libraries have been brought together into a more interconnected system. Modern communications and intra-branch deliveries of Library materials have allowed the branches to be administered effectively from a single location. Computerized borrower registration and inventory control have allowed both residents and library materials to move freely between branches.

And move they do! An analysis of recent data about where library borrowers go for service reveals that fully 24% of the loan transactions that took place during the sample period were not in a resident’s “home” library. In today’s busy world, many Placer County borrowers prefer to use a library near where they work, shop, or go to school, rather than where they sleep. Borrowers who choose a library other than their local branch tend to choose Auburn, Rocklin, or Colfax. These three libraries, conveniently located near other amenities and easily accessed by freeway, are magnets for their surrounding regions.

MAINTAINING QUALITY LIBRARY SERVICE IN A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

The Placer County Library cannot maintain quality by resting on its laurels or by ignoring the changing context in which services are offered. While it is impossible to predict the exact future, it is important to develop a strategy that aligns well with the trends in technology, publishing, and consumer expectations that are most likely to exert a strong influence on the Placer County Library in the years to come.

CHANGES IN TECHNOLOGY

Consumer-Driven Innovation

By making computers – and coaching in their use – available at the Library, the County ensures that all residents can take advantage of the convenience and opportunities afforded by our networked world. Residents who do not own a computer, who do not have good connectivity at home, who only have one computer and multiple children in school, or who are on the go and need to check something quickly online, all appreciate the public access computers, the broadband connection, and the free Wi-Fi at the Placer County Library.

Not surprisingly, use of Placer County Library's computers has increased significantly since their introduction – up 47% since 2005. Back then, most residents' inquiries were about how to find needed information using the Library's print collections. The majority of today's reference questions include at least one technology component, as residents ask for help with hardware and software, the Internet, and consumer technologies such as e-reader apps. A midlife job seeker in 2005 would be directed towards a printed guide to preparing a resume. The same job seeker in 2013 discovers that the only way to apply for a job is online, and needs coaching on how to use a mouse for the first time. The information that County residents need has become inextricably linked with the technology tools used to discover, present, and apply that information.

In the past, new technology found its way into the Library gradually, from the top down. New information retrieval and management systems were developed by the military, the telecommunications industry, and major universities. These projects were eventually commercialized, adapted for the library environment, and made more affordable. County libraries could watch and wait as this process unfolded, embracing the new technologies only after years of preliminary development, refinement, and exposure.

Nowadays, the Placer County Library is far more impacted by consumer technology, which "trickles up." Home users who got iPads and Kindles for Christmas last year expected the Library to be ready to connect to them to e-books before the New Year began. The consumer technology development cycle is, for competitive reasons, largely invisible; product unveilings are followed immediately by rapid roll-

out. This will require that the Library stay abreast of a constantly changing consumer market, adapt library techniques quickly to accommodate popular mainstream interfaces, train all staff in end-user products and strategies, and plan for a shorter equipment obsolescence and replacement schedule. At present the Placer County Library has insufficient capacity in this area.

Information Everywhere

There has been no slowdown in the social, political, economic, and cultural changes caused by the spread of networked digital information and communications technologies. Wireless connectivity and handheld devices have made it possible for Placer County residents to access information anytime, anywhere. Broadband Internet reaches more County households every day, making it possible to download or stream masses of content directly to consumers on demand. While Placer County still has isolated areas that lack this level of connectivity, planners at all levels of government see full coverage as one of the keys to future success. The Placer County Library has a vital role to play in making broadband services available to the public, and will continue to play a central role in connecting residents with information from an ever increasing variety of sources.

The Library is no longer a finite collection of scarce materials; now the challenge is to draw from and contribute to the stream of content that surrounds us all. In this environment, the Placer County Library is adopting the goal of helping residents carry library services with them wherever they go. In the future, tools such as library applications for the iPhone will enable County residents to have a truly portable, seamless library experience.

As instant access to both services and content becomes more pervasive, questions of security and privacy of data have also begun to arise. Due diligence on the Library's part and close coordination with County IT will be needed to ensure compliance with laws and best practices related to data encryption, authentication, rights, access, and disposal of data.

Creative Commons

Placer County residents are increasingly looking to their Library to provide gathering space for active learning, highly interactive computing, both formal and informal work areas, and meeting places. Solo study has given way to active collaboration and group projects. Learning activities are now being redesigned to engage all the senses, not just silent listening and reading. Creativity is often a highly social activity.

Shared learning experiences are now recognized as an excellent way to build community. The Placer County Library is no longer the grocery store – shelves stocked with “ingredients” that people take elsewhere to use. It is becoming the kitchen – a place where people stay to make things. The Library continues to rearrange its interiors to offer work areas that encourage tinkering and creating, and conversation-friendly seating.

CHANGES IN PUBLISHING

Diversification of Reading

Publishing is not just about printed books anymore. Some argue that the proliferation of e-books and self-published web content signals an end to the world of print, and by extension, an end to the need for libraries. There is no question that traditional printed books represent a decreasing percentage of the publishing market, but there is no evidence that print will become obsolete any time soon. Placer County's readers, young and old, are not abandoning print; rather, they are diversifying – reading more than ever, in multiple formats. The primary divide in the consumption of published content is not between print consumers vs. electronic consumers, but between readers vs. non-readers.

At the same time we are seeing a rise in trans-media storytelling – using different media types and technologies to tell a single story. This goes beyond the movie-with-a-book-and-videogame-tie-in to include streaming video, apps, HTML, embedded software, print, and live presentations. The Placer County Library is beginning to branch out into all of these areas, rebranding around readers, reading, and stories rather than limiting collections to printed books. It continues to champion reading of all types for all ages.

The Impact of E-Books

Nearly forty percent of Placer County's population was born within the past 30 years, and have never known a world without technology. For them, the Library is the convergence of the physical and digital experience, providing the context and framework to help them understand and navigate the vast quantity (and inconsistent quality) of information available online. But for these Placer County residents, as well as for their older neighbors, the printed book is still very much in use. The printed book has been – and will continue to be – a cornerstone of learning for residents of all ages.

The Placer County Library, like other progressive public libraries, has begun to diversify into e-books, currently offering access to 3,500 titles, or 1% of its total collection, for download. In the coming year, the Library is expected to add more than 1,000 e-books to the collection. A reasonable target for the next five years would be for 10-15% of the Placer County Library's total holdings to be in digital format by 2018. By 2023, we can expect that at least 25-30% of the Library's collections will be presented in e-formats.

As books and media leave the currently crowded shelves, the space that opens up will permit better access to the remaining materials. Shelf heights will come down, aisles will widen, and increased face-out display of materials will promote better browse-ability. Both the Library and the community will have more opportunity to curate materials in new ways that reflect local interests and to share them in ways that generate new ideas. As a result, despite the smaller number of materials in the collection, the floor area needed to house them will not necessarily decrease in direct proportion.

In this environment, it will be more important than ever for the Library to be flexible and adaptable in order to accommodate change over time. The period of technological transformation is far from over, and no one can yet predict when – if ever – information devices and formats will stabilize and standardize. The Placer County Library’s buildings and systems will need to provide the flexibility to add, subtract, and rearrange walls, shelves, seating, and technology over the course of decades.

Access, Not Ownership

With the movement to e-formats there has also been a significant shift in how published material is priced and distributed. Many e-publishers are following the lead of mainstream software companies; rather than selling a product outright, they are licensing the right to access that product.

Digital Rights Management (DRM) refers to access technologies that can be used by hardware manufacturers, publishers and copyright holders to retain control of – and sometimes impose limitations on – the use of digital content and devices. Much of the digital content available on the Internet is not protected by copyright. However, having witnessed the widespread piracy that accompanied the introduction of music download technology, the e-book industry (including distributors) is actively pursuing ways to control the loaning and sharing of digital content more closely.

The publishing industry has not yet settled on a consistent library pricing model for e-content and increasing competition means that they may not do so any time soon. In general, libraries access/licensing costs for e-books remain comparable to the cost of purchasing print materials. This means that the Placer County Library will need to continue to maintain its collection budget at historical levels if it is to maintain quality for its readers. However, some cost savings will ultimately result from this transition. Investing in e-books will contribute to improved efficiency and reduced costs for inventory control, as there are no delivery delays, no packing and shipping costs, and no overdue fines associated with electronic materials.

CHANGES IN RESIDENTS’ EXPECTATIONS

Before the Internet, cable TV, and video games, when information – both serious and recreational – was scarce and expensive, the Placer County Library did not have to compete for customers. It was the primary information provider in town, and was in a position to set service priorities and dictate terms of use. Today’s consumer has many choices, and evaluates the Library in light of other mainstream services.

Hospitality

Placer County residents expect the Library to welcome them and treat them as valued guests. This experience begins even before entering the building, and continues in a desire for ample parking, “people space,” creature comforts such as refreshments for purchase, and attentive staff. They expect

everyone who works at the Library to be trained to be a customer service first responder, offering service throughout the Library at the point of need, and not just at fixed service desks.

Convenience

Placer County's busy consumers choose their day-to-day service providers based largely on perceived convenience. When forced to choose between quality and convenience, they generally opt for convenience. If they just need orange juice, they don't usually make the trip to the store they know to have the finest quality groceries in the region; they stop at the store where they don't have to make a left turn. The challenge for the Placer County Library is to offer services that are both high in quality and extremely convenient. For example, feedback from the survey and public meetings that were conducted during the development of the new strategic plan indicated that an overhaul of the Library's virtual presence is definitely needed. An improved, full-service web site, cashless transactions, and options for after-hours service are all part of this convenience strategy.

Timeliness

Nowadays everyone seems to be in a hurry, and Placer County residents want the Library to respect the value of their time. While there will always be a need for oases of peace and calm in this high-speed world, consumers now want to make their own decisions about when they want to slow down the pace and when there's a need for speed. Many County residents, especially busy young parents, now expect a full range of services to be instantly available 24/7, whether they are at home, at work, or on the run. Working families in particular expect library facilities to be open nights and weekends. The Library must improve its processes to meet residents' expectations for very short wait times for most transactions. "Slow but free" is not a viable service philosophy.

Self-Directed Success

Increasingly, today's consumers want to be in the driver's seat. Ease of use has to be a top priority if Placer County Library borrowers are to achieve success without extensive staff intervention. User-initiated processes must be simple on the surface, with more depth/complexity available if desired. This is not to say that self-directed, automated transactions are the preferred means of interaction in all situations. County residents do not want to be abandoned. They look for a human face to accompany any self-service technology, but they want that human to be available as a coach rather than a gatekeeper. They respond positively to Library staff that is welcoming and supportive but not controlling.

In this environment, all Placer County Library staff must function as facilitators, ready to provide on-the-spot coaching and technology problem-solving. They must be easy to spot and summon to the point of need, display a positive customer service attitude, demonstrate excellent knowledge of what the Library and the County have to offer, where it can be found, and how to use it.

A NEW SERVICE VISION

The heart of this planning process was the incorporation of a variety of community perspectives in a new vision for the Placer County Library's future. Representatives of educational groups, nonprofit organizations, the business community, local government, library volunteers, and the community at large shared their insights about the future of Placer County and its Public Library. They envisioned:

Service

Library service will honor Placer County's small town feel, providing a personal touch while attracting and engaging residents of all ages. The Library will be a vibrant gathering place that encourages active learning, civic participation, and a strong sense of place.

Service will be simple, consistent, and easy to use. Services will be available at convenient hours, and will be accessible to all residents.

All of this will take place in attractive and comfortable spaces, suitable for groups as well as individual use.

Technology

The Library will provide modern equipment, content, tools, and coaching to ensure that all Placer County residents can take advantage of the convenience and opportunities afforded by the networked world.

The Library will offer convenient 24/7 services – transactions as well as information – online, via a modern web site and social media.

Downloadable e-books and other new media will augment – but not replace – the Library's large, diverse print collections.

Partnerships

The Library will pursue partnerships with other agencies, public and private, non-profit and for-profit; to address residents' needs in areas such as education, wellness, and economic development. It will also partner to improve its own performance in areas such as grant development and technology. As a result of these efforts, Placer County residents will benefit from more seamless service, provided with minimal duplication of effort.

Value

The Library will provide services that are prudently managed and fiscally sustainable. It will invest in future generations as well as current needs.

STRATEGIES AND INITIATIVES

STRATEGY: REVERSE EROSION IN LIBRARY SERVICES

Service: Ensure residents' access to Library resources and provide a venue for community identity and engagement by:

- Moving beyond an interconnected system of small "town" libraries to a fully interdependent network of County library service outlets.
- Pursuing opportunities to extend Library hours.
- Positioning the Library as the hub of the community, a place to gather and exchange views.
- Inviting participation in Library events and offerings via social media and other word-of-mouth channels.

Facilities: Provide a welcoming environment and demonstrate good stewardship of the public's investment in library buildings by:

- Remodeling existing facilities to replace worn finishes and furnishings.
- Establishing a maintenance cycle for refreshing and updating facilities.

Development: Help get all of the County's children onto the path towards success by:

- Providing materials, programs, and services that focus on reading readiness, school success, and family literacy.

Materials: Continually update Library collections to promote reading, free choice learning, entertainment, and individual development by:

- Diversifying Library collections to embrace new formats such as e-books and streaming media.
- Collecting and preserving materials that reflect the unique history and identity of this region.
- Collecting and presenting materials that highlight important County issues and priorities.
- Establishing a maintenance cycle for refreshing Library collections to maintain an engaging and up-to-date information resource for County residents.
- Treat the Library's collections as a single countywide resource, and explore innovative ways to deliver and present materials in response to community needs and interests.

Technology: Provide the tools residents need to access information, apply for jobs, use County e-Government forms and services, and connect with friends and family by:

- Ensuring the availability of public access computers, with coaching and assistance, in the Library.
- Improving the library's web site to mirror in-building services 24/7.
- Establishing a maintenance cycle for updating Library technology, including thoughtful pilot projects for introducing new tools and equipment, and merciful phase-outs for retiring outdated tools and equipment.

Staffing: Train, equip, and deploy Library staff to deliver service effectively by:

- Using professional staff to design services centrally, and support staff to deliver those services locally.
- Using volunteers to supplement paid personnel where appropriate.

Funding: Diversify revenue sources by:

- Seeking grant funds and donations.
- Pursuing partnerships to establish endowments and increase planned giving.

STRATEGY: MODERNIZE OPERATIONS TO IMPROVE EFFICIENCY AND EXPAND SERVICES

Service: Reduce the unit cost of routine customer transactions by:

- Anticipating residents' needs by pre-packaging "how-to" guides in a variety of formats to provide quick responses to frequently-encountered requests and situations.
- Making self-directed service the first choice for checkout, check in, registration, catalog look-up, fine and fee payment, and holds placement, with assistance from Library staff as needed.

Facilities: Increase usable space at existing facilities without expanding the building footprints by:

- Increasing flexibility of existing interiors so that all spaces are usable throughout open hours.
- Rebalancing floor plans to provide more people space.
- Developing outdoor areas.

Materials: Optimize materials handling by:

- Implementing new statistical tools for collection monitoring and management.
- "Floating" more materials between branches.

Technology: Improve ease of use for customers and ease of maintenance for staff by:

- Preferring mainstream consumer technologies over library-only tools, where feasible.

Staffing: Improve customer service at the point of need by:

- Replacing a fixed, desk-based service model with a staff that circulates around the Library assisting customers at the point of need. Cross training all Library employees to be “first responders” in all areas of basic customer service.

Funding: Leverage Library resources in new ways for greater return on investment by:

- Pursuing new partnerships and in-kind exchanges of service with other agencies and coordinating services to shared audiences.

STRATEGY: BUILD CAPACITY FOR THE FUTURE

Service: Realign Library services with changes in the way people live, work, and learn by:

- Concentrating hours at magnet libraries.
- Extending services beyond supplying information to helping residents apply information.

Facilities: Create Library spaces to house 21st Century Library services by:

- Working with the County Capital Improvements Division, Facilities Services Department, to develop a long-range facilities master plan that identifies future space needs.
- Exploring opportunities to co-locate Library services with other high-use destinations

Development: Leverage Library resources to enhance the economic climate in Placer County by:

- Offering spaces, tools, materials, and programs that support small business creation.
- Offering classes and computer resources that support workforce development and job seeking.
- Providing a competitive quality-of-life amenity to attract new businesses to locate in Placer County.
- Developing destination libraries that attract visitors and encourage tourism.

Materials: Keep pace with rapid changes in how information is published and disseminated by:

- Increasing the proportion of the collection that is held in electronic formats, with a target of 15% by 2018.
- Creating a repository for new e-content that is being created here in Placer County.

Technology: Increase the Library’s ability to offer electronic materials and services by:

- Partnering with other agencies to extend broadband connectivity.

Staffing: Work across traditional boundaries to leverage Library expertise by:

- Exploring opportunities to co-staff services with other County agencies.
- Positioning the Library as the research department for County government.

- Partnering with community groups and volunteers to extend library-designed services using non-library providers.

Funding: Insure against shortfalls in traditional revenues by:

- Identifying new revenue sources.
- Building prudent reserves.

APPENDIX

HIGHLIGHTS FROM PLACER COUNTY LIBRARY COMMUNITY CONVERSATION AND STAFF WORKSHOP

On June 27 and 28, 2012, strategic planning consultants Joan Frye Williams and George Needham conducted two workshops, the first for Placer County community leaders, the second for permanent full time staff of the Placer County Library. The two groups were asked a similar set of questions and the chart below reflects a comparison of their answers on several of the key issues.

This summary is one piece of the information gathered in the development of the Library’s new strategy. It will be combined with input gleaned in conversations in the branch libraries, from the community survey, and with input from the Library Advisory Board to create the framework for the strategy.

| Community Leaders | Library Staff |
|--|--|
| Strengths and assets of the Placer County region | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rich history and tradition • Natural beauty, climate, and year-round outdoor activities • Strong arts community • Philanthropists and volunteers • Small town feel with convenient amenities • Safe, family-friendly • Diverse agricultural base • Solution driven and open to innovation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History • Natural beauty and climate, with excellent recreational opportunities • Arts • Friendly people who care about their community • Small town feel • Safe; great place to raise kids • Locally grown produce • Roots—sense of ownership; long term families • Reasonable cost of living |
| Positive attributes of other organizations that the Library could emulate | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interactive • Visible in the community • Strong brand • Convenient online presence • Centrally-located gathering place • Tourism destination | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tied to local community • Easy to navigate, 24/7 access • Convenient location and schedule |

| | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focal point for community interaction • Quick, easy to use • Diverse user base • Good place to chill • Collaboration for mutual benefit • Continuity across generations; “the nostalgia factor” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clean, fresh • Accessible from multiple entry points • Volunteers • Lots of variety in one place |
| Top priorities for this region | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transportation • Education • Broadband coverage • Economic growth and sustainability • Communication: Keeping residents engaged and informed • Service delivery in an era of fiscal constraint • Preservation of the small town lifestyle | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public transportation • Education • Jobs; promoting Placer County as a place to locate new business and retain existing ones • Keeping young people in the County by offering jobs, educational opportunities, and other services • Literacy |
| What would make you proud/prouder of your Library? | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beautiful, clean, inviting locations, with interiors reflecting the creativity possible within • Updated technology • Large, diverse collections • Improved access to e-books | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beautiful, clean, attractive, environmentally friendly facilities • Stronger web site |

| | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanded hours to match the needs of working families (evenings and weekends) • Fun • Easy to use • Friendly, knowledgeable, well-prepared, passionate staff • Food and coffee • Vibrant, modern online presence • Open and accessible to all residents • More promotion and better connections with the media • More community events, especially for adults • Broad-based partnerships with all groups in the community • A true social network • A hub for the community; a “go to place” • Stay open minded | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open and extend hours through nights and weekends • More staff • Community is more aware of what we do, and chooses the Library first • Meaningful community events and programming; more space for community meetings • More staff time for outreach • Hub/portal for the community • Cool place for teens |
|---|---|

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|--|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strong volunteer program, based on tasks and talents beyond shelving• Public officials brag about the Library; people talk about how great the Library is |
|--|--|

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