

DeKalb Public Library

Strategic Plan

2015-2018

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“The public library is a center of public happiness first, of public education next.”

– John Cotton Dana, *A Library Primer*

Background

This report details the results of the planning process carried out by the staff, Board of the DeKalb Public Library (DKPL), patrons, volunteers and community partners in conjunction with consultant, Alicia Schatteman, from December 2013 to June 2014.

The results of an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the library, as well as the opportunities and threats that it faces, were particularly important to the process and the resulting plan. The Appendix to this report includes a summary of all the stakeholder comments from this process.

Overall Library Trends

Research at the Pew Research Center shows the relevance of libraries to Americans:

- 54% of Americans have used a public library in the past year, goes up to 70% of all parents
- 67% of American adults believe a library closing would have a major impact on their community
- 95% believe libraries play an important role in giving everyone a chance to succeed, they promote literacy and a love of reading, and improve the quality of life in a community
- 30% of Americans 16+ are highly engaged with public libraries:
 - Frequent use of public libraries
 - Parents, students, and job seekers, younger, higher levels of education
 - 80% visited a library in the past year
- 39% are moderately engaged:
 - 50% visited a library in the past year
 - Tend to live a little farther from a library
 - Centered in small towns
- 64% of Americans 16+ have visited a library website at least once in the previous 12 months

However, there are many societal and technological trends affecting public libraries in the United States today.

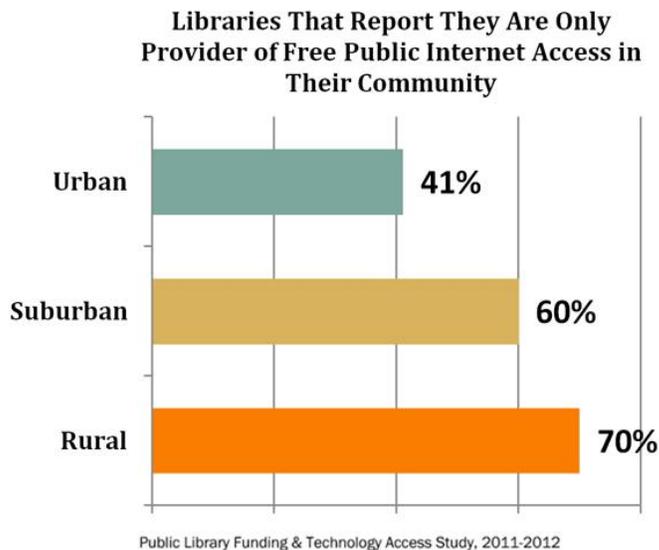
- **Cultural diversity:** In the City of DeKalb (Census 2010) about 13% of the population is African American, and almost the same amount identifies themselves as Hispanic or Latino. About 16% speak a language other than English at home. About 10% of the population is foreign born. Libraries are “the new type of town square, a place for people of all ages and

backgrounds to seek help, connect with others, and get access to the information and services they need” (ICMA 2011, 1).

- **Income inequality and poverty:** According to the 2001 Census, 30% of DeKalb residents live below the poverty level. At DeKalb High School, 44.5% are from low income households and 2.1% are homeless. Among low income DHS students, 32.5% met or exceeded competency, compared to 35.1% for Illinois (Chicago Tribune).

Poverty and low income issues are prevalent in DeKalb for many residents which impacts their ability to reach and use library services. Furthermore, libraries serve individuals who either choose not to pay for certain products or cannot afford to purchase these products. The latest economic recession drove more people into the library, but free access will likely keep them coming back.

In addition, sometimes libraries are the only provider of free public internet access in their community (ALA & IPAC 2011).



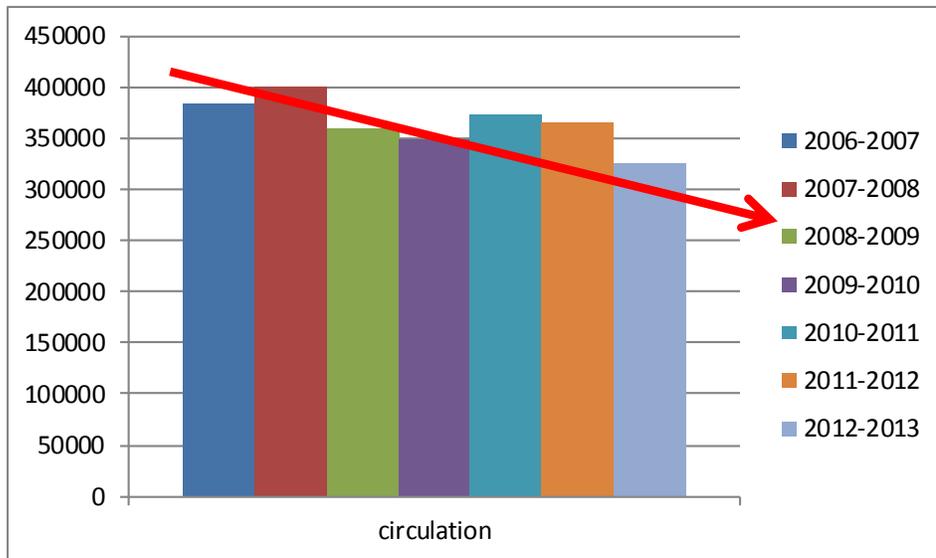
- **Reading Adversity:** Recent studies have shown the decline in reading. In particular, children and teens favor “screens” like television, computers, gaming and other electronic pastimes to reading. Libraries are trying innovative ways to improve literacy such as the Free Library of Philadelphia “a sparkling new demonstration kitchen” to house its innovative Culinary Literacy Center. The Center will incorporate literacy, math, science and problem-solving into cooking and nutrition classes.

Literacy rates for DeKalb High School students are measured by Prairie State Achievement Examination, a statewide assessment of 11th-grade student performance in reading, math and science (Chicago Tribune). For the most recent reporting year (2012-2013), just 51.1% met or exceeded reading competencies, compared to 54.8% of all Illinois students. Among low income DHS students, 32.5% met or exceeded competency (35.1% for IL).

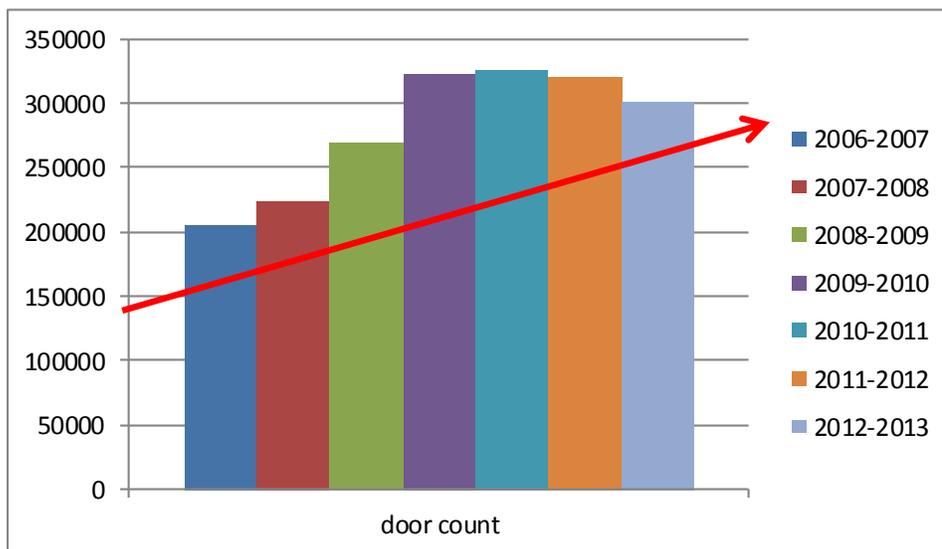
Book circulation is declining at the DKPL as it is in other libraries, while computer use and media checkouts are increasing. According to the Pew Research Center (2014), 76% of adults read a book in some format over the previous year (average for adults was 5), 69%

read print books, 28% read an e-book and 14% listened to an audiobook. The following tables come from data collected by DeKalb Public Library staff.

Book Circulation at DKPL



Door Count at DKPL



Evidenced by this data, traditional book circulation is trending downwards and door count is trending upwards. Door count rose significantly during the recession and has remained close to this same level ever since. These data suggests that how people are using the DeKalb Public Library is changing; less book circulation and more ways of engaging patrons besides the traditional circulation of items. Many services that the library offers are offered from a distance such as digital magazines, digital music, digital books, searching of databases and librarians (email, chat, phone, social media etc.). This trend is likely to continue. But it's not just remote services that are changing libraries, but also the type of variety of programming and materials offered on-site.

- **High customer service expectations:** High quality customer-centered businesses have set a high bar for fast, friendly, and quality service. Library staff members are pressured to handle service desk calls, phones, and email. The DKPL is also challenged to meet expectations of patrons coming from larger and more resourced libraries in the Chicago suburbs and beyond.

In terms of services provided, here is how the DKPL compares:

| Library Name/Location | Book Volume | Hours Open | Number of Visits | Total Circulation | Total Programs | Kids Programs | Young Adult Programs | Total Attendance |
|-----------------------|----------------|--------------|------------------|-------------------|----------------|---------------|----------------------|------------------|
| LAKE VILLA | 169,568 | 3,588 | 489,000 | 1,010,684 | 861 | 712 | 23 | 20,274 |
| ROUND LAKE AREA | 148,901 | 3,328 | 224,979 | 368,764 | 616 | 277 | 36 | 10,991 |
| QUINCY | 138,542 | 5,155 | 214,000 | 614,824 | 682 | 435 | 87 | 26,002 |
| CRYSTAL LAKE | 166,416 | 3,323 | 368,168 | 1,055,341 | 1,082 | 799 | 50 | 31,663 |
| ALGONQUIN AREA | 195,488 | 6,240 | 440,487 | 1,313,887 | 781 | 604 | 34 | 16,893 |
| VERNON AREA | 222,598 | 3,508 | 353,020 | 923,268 | 666 | 519 | 31 | 35,811 |
| URBANA | 257,730 | 3,523 | 493,628 | 800,569 | 1,236 | 1,002 | 40 | 47,806 |
| MCHENRY | 149,154 | 3,440 | 195,514 | 618,209 | 407 | 230 | 50 | 13,156 |
| ZION-BENTON | 131,016 | 2,912 | 187,812 | 253,511 | 496 | 351 | 14 | 11,948 |
| INDIAN PRAIRIE | 144,781 | 3,744 | 423,352 | 855,777 | 668 | 306 | 115 | 27,178 |
| LOMBARD | 186,677 | 3,610 | 273,840 | 591,959 | 441 | 369 | 7 | 18,855 |
| MOLINE | 139,725 | 3,220 | 331,727 | 501,661 | 534 | 361 | 42 | 17,569 |
| SIX MILE REGIONAL | 89,682 | 5,200 | 130,072 | 241,801 | 156 | 155 | 0 | 6,049 |
| DEKALB | 142,494 | 3,588 | 325,555 | 373,803 | 715 | 595 | 43 | 26,407 |
| ELMHURST | 304,665 | 3,656 | 531,776 | 1,394,183 | 1,012 | 755 | 90 | 26,564 |
| BARRINGTON | 224,463 | 5,200 | 409,520 | 1,208,773 | 737 | 555 | 17 | 29,240 |
| BELLEVILLE | 115,035 | 5,200 | 296,964 | 254,400 | 68 | 51 | 2 | 6,255 |
| GLENVIEW | 239,904 | 3,744 | 357,326 | 747,370 | 707 | 372 | 15 | 27,910 |
| DOWNERS GROVE | 283,849 | 3,636 | 636,971 | 1,013,929 | 468 | 291 | 17 | 28,357 |
| HAYNER | 227,985 | 10,374 | 548,222 | 561,954 | 306 | 163 | 68 | 9,270 |

bold=DeKalb, red highlight=highest, blue highlight=lowest

DKPL is about in the middle in terms of hours open (3,588 hours) which is close to the average for these libraries (3,969). DeKalb is also about the same as the average in terms of number of visits (325,555 compared to the average of 343,327). Expectations also have to do with the resources available.

- **Library Financial Resources:** Public libraries in Illinois are mainly funded through municipal taxes but with wide variation. In terms of finances, the following information was taken from survey data collected by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, a nationwide survey of public libraries (most recent available is FY 2012). The following table summarizes financial data from public libraries in Illinois with community populations between 40,000-50,000 residents.

| Library Name/Location | City | Population | Total Staff | % of revenue from sources other than govt | % of revenue from local government | % of revenue from all levels of government | Total Revenue divided by total population |
|-----------------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|---|------------------------------------|--|---|
| LAKE VILLA | LAKE VILLA | 40,276 | 36.28 | 4.47% | 94.46% | 95.53% | \$114.52 |
| ROUND LAKE AREA | ROUND LAKE | 40,400 | 33.72 | 4.22% | 95.38% | 95.78% | \$64.00 |
| QUINCY | QUINCY | 40,633 | 32.51 | 15.97% | 65.31% | 84.03% | \$55.23 |
| CRYSTAL LAKE | CRYSTAL LAKE | 40,743 | 50.89 | 5.31% | 93.72% | 94.69% | \$102.71 |
| ALGONQUIN AREA | ALGONQUIN | 40,809 | 57.59 | 2.15% | 96.46% | 97.85% | \$136.78 |
| VERNON AREA | LINCOLNSHIRE | 41,055 | 71.09 | 1.85% | 97.02% | 98.15% | \$160.71 |
| URBANA | URBANA | 41,250 | 46.03 | 7.28% | 89.24% | 92.72% | \$79.74 |
| MCHENRY | MCHENRY | 42,023 | 36.27 | 3.12% | 95.72% | 96.88% | \$73.86 |
| ZION-BENTON | ZION | 42,403 | 27.24 | 4.62% | 87.75% | 95.38% | \$48.36 |
| INDIAN PRAIRIE | DARIEN | 42,529 | 42.59 | 5.35% | 91.85% | 94.65% | \$76.26 |
| HELEN M. PLUM | LOMBARD | 43,160 | 43.94 | 2.95% | 93.97% | 97.05% | \$72.20 |
| MOLINE | MOLINE | 43,483 | 30.35 | 3.47% | 93.65% | 96.53% | \$65.04 |
| SIX MILE REGIONAL | GRANITE CITY | 43,757 | 28.5 | 2.00% | 95.18% | 98.00% | \$38.17 |
| DEKALB | DEKALB | 43,862 | 51.53 | 19.89% | 74.74% | 80.11% | \$54.79 |
| ELMHURST | ELMHURST | 44,121 | 72.82 | 4.51% | 91.62% | 95.49% | \$166.42 |
| BARRINGTON | BARRINGTON | 44,157 | 60.58 | 4.27% | 93.66% | 95.73% | \$147.42 |
| BELLEVILLE | BELLEVILLE | 44,478 | 20.66 | 5.34% | 85.29% | 94.66% | \$28.78 |
| GLENVIEW | GLENVIEW | 44,692 | 70.96 | 2.53% | 86.69% | 97.47% | \$148.80 |
| DOWNERS GROVE | DOWNERS GROVE | 47,833 | 58.64 | 4.05% | 93.33% | 95.95% | \$89.69 |
| HAYNER | ALTON | 49,374 | 44.58 | 3.71% | 84.41% | 96.29% | \$69.00 |

bold=DeKalb, red highlight=highest, blue highlight=lowest

Out of their comparison group, DKPL relies the least on government funding (federal, state and local combined) at 80.11% which means the library raises nearly 20% of its operating budget beyond public taxes or nearly four times the average of 5.35%. Only Quincy is close to DeKalb in terms of raising money from non-public sources at 15.96%. All of the other libraries are below 8%.

DeKalb also has the fourth lowest per capita cost among these libraries at just \$54.79 per resident. The highest was Elmhurst, followed by Vernon Area, Glenview and Barrington at nearly \$150 per resident. The average is \$89.62. The other communities are investing significantly in tax dollars in their public libraries. Whereas, there is an argument to be made for efficiency, there is also underinvestment. But finances are only part of the story.

When comparing those public libraries that receive higher percentage of their revenue from the tax base (government funds), they are also more likely to have more staff, higher book circulation, higher total programs and higher total attendance. If we compare DKPL with Urbana (also a university town), the DKPL is spending almost \$80

per person for the local library per year. Local taxes account for 97% of Urbana's operating income.

The operating hours (3,500) are about the same as DeKalb, but almost all reported outputs are double that of DeKalb (visits, total circulation, total programs, kids programs and total attendance). Both libraries have about the same number of young adult programs. Municipal support for the library has therefore doubled the recorded outputs for the library because the library is able to invest in more staff and other resources to expand the libraries offerings.

In Glen View, a Chicago suburb, per capita spending is \$149 compared to \$55 in DeKalb. They receive about 97% of their funding from government sources (of which nearly 87% is coming from local taxes) so they are fundraising for just 2.5%. It is nearly the same story as Urbana. Glenview library is open for about the same number of hours but some other outputs are double that of DeKalb (book volume, visits and total circulation). DeKalb is offering about the same number of total programs as Glenview and has about the same amount of total attendance.

- **Libraries as Learning Centers:** The Public Library in Pima County, Arizona partners with the county's Department of Health to offer counseling and health screenings at the library. The Chicago Public Library created a Maker Lab, with access to 3-D printers, laser cutters and milling machines. Boston's public library has a teen area that includes lounges, restaurant booths, game rooms, and digital labs. Libraries are focusing on multiple literacies.
- **New Library Expansion:** This plan also does not specifically address the library expansion project now underway, but it also assumes that the expansion will take place as planned. It is even more important as the new building goes up to address these issues and have a plan in place.

Mission and Vision

REVISED MISSION STATEMENT

The DeKalb Public Library seeks to enrich the lives of DeKalb residents by supporting and encouraging lifelong learning and being a vital center of community life.

VISION

The DeKalb Public Library will be a welcoming environment where all residents can connect with each other through library services and programs as well as through the use of technology; where they can be inspired and find the information necessary to achieve their full potential. The library will have a visible and vibrant presence in the community through 21st century library services and partnering with other community organizations. Library staff will provide courteous, responsive, quality programs and services that appeal to the diverse DeKalb community. The library will provide a safe and inviting community space and meet the needs of residents who access library services online or at a distance (website, databases, e-content, mobile services).

Issue #1: The municipal funding for the DeKalb Public Library is the lowest percentage among comparable libraries in the State of Illinois. Furthermore, the library does not have a history of individual fundraising as part of its revenue strategy. They have been able to secure state and foundation funding, mainly for program expenses but these do not address operational needs like additional staff or other overhead expenses. With the capital campaign underway bringing attention to the fundraising needs of the library, a strategic goal needs to address these weaknesses and opportunities.

Strategic Goal: Be a leading public organization by attracting and managing our resources wisely and sustainably

The library board is expected to maintain the highest levels of efficiency and integrity with the funds they provide to operate the library. The board practices transparent government and aligns resources with mission, goals and priorities. Board members are stewards of the physical and financial assets entrusted to the library. Library revenues will be strategically allocated for smart and streamlined delivery of services. Resources include human resources, staff and volunteers.

Objectives:

- Board and staff work with the City of DeKalb and the Library Board to ensure proper financing of the library from the tax base.
- Work with the City of DeKalb and the Library Board to ensure that the library's annual budget meets the state standards for local libraries.
- Invest in fundraising/development staff at the Library to develop the library's capacity to support an individual annual giving strategy.
- Assist the Friends of the Library group in developing their membership and fundraising capacity to support the library. The Friends organization can either transform itself with a stronger focus on fundraising beyond the used book sales. If not possible or desirable, a new Library Foundation can be created with a clear focus on individual giving and grants. Further, a staff person should be designated to be the point person to coordinate with the associated nonprofit group for maximum effectiveness.
- Include a Board member as a liaison to the Friends group to
- Staff and Board members attend Library and community events to advocate for the library including city board meetings.
- Have one staff person dedicated to fundraising for the Library
- Create a succession plan for the Library Director and monitor staffing levels as more staff members reach retirement age
- Strengthen the staff volunteer coordinator position to formalize the volunteer program, market the program, and provide clear and measurable goals and objectives for this position. Develop a more effective means of volunteer coordination and supervision.
- Increase local government funding of the library to at least 85% of its funding over time (currently it is about 75%), and growing the budget to support spending of \$65 per resident (currently at \$54).

Issue #2: The library is well liked by its patrons but not everyone in the community is engaged with the local library. The library needs to show its value and relevance to those individuals not already engaged with the library.

Strategic Goal: Reflect the whole community in our collections, services and programs

The goal is for all residents to have access to resources and programs that support literacy and lifelong learning to meet educational, informational, and entertainment needs. To determine where to focus resources, basic information about level of use of the library needs to be expanded to include a comprehensive performance measurement system that will capture data on circulation, computer sessions, website visits, use of online databases, reference questions, program attendance, library visitors, program registrations, and outcome measures where possible for select programs. The City of DeKalb is always changing, in terms of its demographics and the presence of Northern Illinois University staff, faculty and students. Significant populations of seniors, the Spanish speaking community and job seekers are three primary stakeholders.

Objectives:

- Evaluate, expand and/or retract programs and services based on primary mission and budget.
- Perform collection management that is responsive to demand.
- Provide resources and services to residents whose first language is not English. Hire staff that reflect the diversity of the community and collect resources in languages that reflect community composition and demand.
- Communicate the library's programs and services as well as the value of those programs and services through the website, e-newsletters, press releases, city marketing efforts, videos and other formats and presentations.
- Train Library Board, staff, Friends, and volunteers to actively promote the library throughout the community, create talking points for commonly asked questions and create short messages about the library and its offerings.
- Develop a comprehensive communications plan that will focus on the news of new technologies including social media.
- Continue to facilitate celebrations that promote reading and literacy for the whole community (such as the Big Read).
- Increase the library's presence at community events and other outreach locations using staff as well as volunteers.
- Expand as resources allow, outreach visits to all public and non-public schools with programs and information about library services.
- Ensure that primary public information (written as well as online) pieces are also available in Spanish such as signage, e-newsletter versions etc.
- Work with community partners who are collecting information on community needs to determine needs and interests of residents. Partners include NIU and the DeKalb County Community Foundation
- Offer programs in Spanish as need and resources are available.
- Partner with Workforce Development Centers or other agencies serving job seekers to provide services and information for this population.

- Enhance existing outreach services for those that are physically unable to come to the library.
- Provide space for community groups to come together at the library. Create a policy for community use and reservation of this space and promote this use in library communications outlets.

Issue #3: This increasingly global and technology-oriented world requires that individuals are able to gather and use information ethically, to seek diverse perspectives, and use technology responsibly and safely.

Strategic Goal: Be known for library excellence with a commitment to multiple literacies (visual, digital, textual and technological)

Objectives:

- Provide technology training for residents of all ages, focusing on those who need basic technology skills to participate in society (complete online applications or file necessary paperwork to the government etc.).
- Host programs and events that respond to the role of technology in people's lives and inspire library patrons to be informed content consumers and creators.
- Develop adequate support for computer systems and wireless networks for staff and library patrons.
- Upgrade library technology to keep pace with user demand and ensure adequate speed and bandwidth for wireless access.
- Train staff on the use of new technologies that would be most useful for library patrons to know how to use
- Support and promote the principles of responsible digital citizenship for staff and the public
- Invest in appropriate digital collections to expand digital offerings to the public
- Conduct a staff technology survey to determine individual competencies and create staff education opportunities to enhance capabilities where needed

Issue #4: Libraries, as other public agencies, need to justify their budgets to external audiences, sometimes to gain political support and other time to gain financial support. In order to do this, the library must commit to a culture of innovation and assessment. In addition to collecting prescribed statistics (such as book circulation and door count), the library needs to undertake a more comprehensive performance measurement system. This will enable the library to demonstrate clearly the value of the public library and draw resources in. Decisions should be based on facts, research and analysis that will maximize anticipated outcomes and impacts of the library on the community that they serve. Creating a culture of innovation and assessment is neither easy nor quick but can be a catalyst to draw staff together towards common objectives, improve customer service, improve staff morale, and demonstrate value to all of its stakeholders.

Strategic Goal: Support and grow a culture of innovation and assessment

Objectives:

- Create a performance measurement program for the library that is useful to front line staff in developing and offering programs, as well as managers and the Board. The PM system would have output and outcome goals.
- Identify specific performance measures, that are tied to the strategic goals, along with a time frame for achieving targets for each measure
- Staff need to be trained on performance measurement assessment tools and how their use will become part of the normal work process
- Maintain communications with all the library's stakeholders when identifying the performance measures, collecting the data, and reporting the data
- All library programs will be evaluated for quality and impact
- Staff need the opportunity and the resources to improve their own performance measurement skills
- Commit to a regular schedule for the library patron survey (every other year), where outcomes will be benchmarked, targets created and measured against
- Empower staff members to recommend and assist with developing appropriate performance measures for a particular service or program
- Communicate regularly with all stakeholders about the library's performance; goals or targets, accomplishments
- Hold regular staff meetings where staff are encouraged to study and chart performance, talk about where adjustments need to be made, where there are gaps in service
- Investigate gathering data about patron use of the library by requiring users to scan their library ID cards when they enter and exit the building, even for a trial period. The data can be combined with use of the collection information to generate reports on the types of library users and services being used.

APPENDIX

a. Process Outline

- The Consultant met with the Director and the Board on December 4, 2013 for a strategic planning session; to review the previous plan, go over a strategic planning process and do a SWOT analysis with the Board
- A memo was written by the consultant on January 4, 2014 to summarize that Board retreat
- The consultant was officially hired to moderate the library's strategic plan February 5, 2014
- The consultant met with a group of patrons and volunteers February 23, 2014
- The consultant met with full-time staff March 3, 2014
- The consultant posted an online survey for staff who did not attend the staff retreat (March 2014)
- The consultant interviews key community partners (April and May 2014)
- A written report from all focus groups and surveys were summarized and presented to staff on May 20, 2014.
- The consultant prepared a final report to the Board of Trustees with a draft strategic plan on June 11, 2014.
- The Strategic Plan is formally adopted by the Board and staff develop action plans with timelines, persons responsible and budget implications (summer 2014)

b. Focus Group with the Board: December 4, 2013

Mission:

The Board was asked "what did they think was the purpose of the DeKalb Public Library?" The phrases that came up when we talked about answering the "why":

- To create quiet and safe spaces within the library that are accessible for all
- To engage in the act of learning, seeing learning happen
- To be meet the information needs of our community
- To improve reading and literacy skills of our community, particularly among those residents who are falling behind, limiting their participation in society
- To "level the playing field" that exists due to income inequality
- To enable everyone to get a good education to get a good job, essentially workforce development; build a support a strong and vibrant community where employees want to live and work and employers want to build their business.

SWOT Analysis

The summary below includes items that are not related to the new building and still may want to be addressed in a new strategic plan. Strengths and weaknesses are internal to the organization and something the organization has control over. Opportunities and threats are external to the organization and may impact the organization. They are summarized on the following page.

| Weaknesses | Strengths |
|--|---|
| Only 18,000 library members with a population serving nearly 50,000. Non-free access to un-incorporated areas. | Have great children/family programs. |
| The director plans to retire in the near future, a few years so need to have plans in place to make the transition to new leadership. There will be several changes on the Board in the medium terms as well. | Experienced and loyal staff who embraces use of technology to better serve patrons. Experienced Board members. |
| The person who is the outreach librarian relies on their own vehicle which is a weakness to growing the program. Could look at leasing a library van to expand the program or set up satellite locations. | An outreach librarian visits people who may not otherwise be able to use the library. |
| Organization does not have a history of giving to the library, few individual donors. Board does not have a history of donating to the organization. | Strong city council support. Receive 80% of funding from taxes (low compared to other municipal libraries in Illinois). |
| Should have a performance measurement system in place to measure outputs (like number of books in circulation) to also measure outcomes and impact, useful for staff to guide decisions and increase opportunities for grant funding. | Excellent professional library practices and collections including the use of technology by staff and patrons. |
| Need a focus on fundraising including a plan tied to the strategic plan to clearly outline plans to support capital projects, operations and programs; institute a formal planned giving program. Invigorate the Friends group to expand their fundraising commitment or create a Library Foundation. | Friends of the Library organize book sales. |
| Increasing grant funding will require more measurement of impact and staff dedicated to fundraising/development. This will require dedicating a fundraising/development staff person (contract, part-time or full-time). Need to investigate comparable size libraries and staff dedicated to development. | Have secured grant funding to support the library; building expansion beginning in 2014. |
| Many of the libraries target audiences who need the most assistance, may not have habits of visiting or using libraries, need to work on attitudes about and behaviors in libraries to better serve their needs. | |
| Limited success in growing a corps of volunteers to assist with library operations, and engage the community. Need staff training to understand best practices of volunteer management. | There is a staff person responsible for volunteer recruitment and coordination. |

| | |
|--|--|
| The library is not accessible to everyone; not on bus route and library visits are not necessarily a habit for all individuals. | |
| Threat | Opportunity |
| Growing reliance on digital media, it is more difficult to evaluate the quality and sources of information. | Media and technology centers that are inviting and welcoming, especially to teens and young adults. |
| Young people understanding the value of a bricks and mortar library when they have Google. May not understand value of libraries and librarians. | Create a community advisory committee for the library with diverse stakeholders to help guide future decisions on library programs and services. Also could be used as a stepping stone for some to move to the Board. |
| Growing rate of poverty in area. | Need to determine the best ways to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse community and focus resources to do it. |
| Some local schools are struggling to meet state and national standards, particularly in reading. | Assess literacy needs of children and parents and then structure programs around those needs. |
| Could turn off some patrons because of public tax status of library (we give through taxes already). | Capital campaign will highlight community involvement and could begin to create habit of giving to the library. |

c. Focus Group with Staff: March 3, 2014

Meeting Coordinator – Prof. Alicia Schatteman

Observer/notes – Anthony Cooling

Fourteen staff members were present at the meeting including the Library Director. Staff not at the meeting will be asked to complete an online survey.

Mission:

Requested a “brainstorming” session of “why the library does what it does.” The goal of focusing on the “why” was to get the participants to not focus on what they do day today, but the mission of the DPL, focusing on impact.

Answers to the “why” question included:

- Promote democracy and an informed citizenry
- Provide free access to information and resources
- Respond to patron’s needs for information
- Be a welcoming and safe community space
- Level the playing field so that everyone (including all levels of income) can get access to information and education
- For leisure and pleasure reading and seeking new ideas
- Libraries are neutral, don’t judge what you read or don’t read
- Allow everyone to participate in the world
- Allow patron’s to access technology and therefore participate broadly
- Support a strong civil society

Strengths

- Customer service
- positive attitudes of staff
- downtown central location
- variety of services
- interlibrary loan resource sharing
- citizen advocates
- outreach for people who can’t get to the library
- Excellent and dedicated staff
- new building
- information technology for patrons
- strong political support
- good relationship with school system

Weaknesses

- internal funds
- lack of staff or lack of staff time
- database issues (problems with searching)
- demand for outreach growing without ability to (possibly) meet the demand
- communication between/among staff due to vastly different schedules
- interlibrary loans as “our” books go elsewhere (the flip side of resource sharing)
- current space
- Library is underfunded because of no fundraising. Grants are constantly being applied for, very few actually gotten. Applying for grants takes lots of staff time as well.
- What kind of communication does the DPL have with the general public? How do you tell people what you do?
- The lack of data will grant applications, especially no trend data
- 80% of DPL’s money comes from taxes, which puts it in about the middle of the pack as per the state norm, fundraising for the difference
- There is a shortage of staff and volunteers to do fundraising.
- The DPL needs to define who it intends to reach, their target audience
- Lack of demographic data, who actually uses the library and for what
- lack of data on users and the public

Opportunities

- Political support
- manufacturing training
- servicing the needs of an informed public
- Partner with schools more, unknown what Common Core curriculum changes mean
- tell the wealthy and the business community of the service the library provides
- The DPL needs to think about hours on Sunday night, when kids are doing their homework.
- Need to begin measuring performance and organization needs to be more tolerant of change and innovation
- The Library Board, city, and state want MORE, donors are interested in IMPACT
- Whatever data there is on patrons and programs, from the old surveys to the testimonials, needs to be saved somewhere accessible, such as a shared folder, so that data can be used to make decisions.

Threats

- average education of households
- little public transit (old bus lines were stopped)
- the poverty rate

- language barriers
- cost of access databases only for DeKalb residents which makes it difficult for the school system which crosses city boundaries to fully utilize the DPL, teachers don't bring kids to the library, Lack of political will for working out the legal issues for remote access to databases
- Cost sharing
- the public's perception of libraries (as outdated)
- Many in the public do not have a library "habit" and they need to be invited to the library to learn.

How do we measure impact?

- 16,000 active card holders out of a population of 45,000 in the city of DeKalb (though the number of NIU students may be making the DPL seem less used than it actually is, as students use the NIU library for their needs).
- Door count, circulation, website hits
- How do you measure the poverty level while serving the poor?
- There is no demographic data of library users.
- One staff member that did programming would have a "post program" survey where she asked zip code. This was of interest to the library director, and seemed like a good start of knowing the customer.
- By statute, all data that there actually is, by statute, gets aggregated and presented to the Library Board.
- How do you measure what actual difference you make in people's lives?
- Google analytics are used to derive DPL website use. The data is sent to department heads.
- Could be experiments on promotions of the library and the activities.
- Testimonials are kept by some staff members, and help with emotional impact and can be used for fund raising.
- library offers anonymity, and there is no judging
- A highly useful survey was done some 5-7 years ago. Would it be worth repeating?
- Due to lack of data, we cannot 100% say the best way to improve the library.

Strategic Issues

- **Outreach:** Encouraging use of the new building by community groups but how would you accommodate? It should be part of policy that there should be an alignment of the DPL's goals and the goals of any groups using their space, creating partnerships, encouraging partnerships with organizations, Relationship with the school district

- **Money:** finding the necessary funding to support staff, programs, investment in technology, broadened programming etc.
- **Services and Programming:** there should be things starting with toddlers going all the way to adults, cater to a diverse population and diverse needs, utilizing technology and promoting use of technology to access library resources as well as online resources to support seeking of information by the public
- **Diversity in the population:** Cultural issues, makes the case for the necessity of libraries to those who don't use them. This means selling their relevancy, and ultimately making them advocates for the DPL, programming to meet their needs, partnering with cultural organizations, signage and marketing materials in other languages

d. Online Survey of Employees (March 4-March 31, 2014)

There were 22 respondents to the survey, 15 part-time and 7 full-time.

The same statements were used for both strengths and weaknesses and respondents were asked to rank them from “1” (most important) to “7” least important.

Statements- Library staff professionalism, library staff customer to the public, library management, library hours of operation, library technology, board governance.

Strengths:

Question: Overall, what do you feel are the most important internal strengths of the Library?

Responses: The areas ranked as being the most important strengths were:

- Library staff customer service to the public (59.1%)
- Library collections (27.3%)

Weaknesses:

Question: Overall, what do you feel are the most important internal weaknesses of the Library?

Responses: The areas ranked as being the most important weaknesses were:

- Board governance (28.6%)
- Library management (23.8%)

The same statements were used for opportunities and threats: Demographic changes in the community, library financial resources to support the community, Public support of the library, Relationship with public schools/Kish College/NIU, Public perception of the library, Political support of the library.

Opportunities:

Question: Overall, what do you feel are the most important external opportunities for the Library now and in the next 3-5 years that should be addressed in this strategic plan? Rank your preferences from 1 (most important) to least important.

Responses: The areas ranked as the most important opportunities were:

- Public perception of the library (59.1%)
- Public support for the library (13.6%)

Additionally, crosstab data shows no statistically significant difference in rankings by part time or full time employees.

Threats:

Question: Overall, what do you feel are the most important external threats for the Library now and in the next 3-5 years that should be addressed in this strategic plan? Rank your preferences from 1 (most important) to least important.

Responses: The areas ranked as the most important threats were:

- Financial resources needed to support the community (45.5%)
- Public perception of the library (13.6%)

The only statistically difference (.048 level, Cramer's V of .712) between part time and full time workers in these rankings was for Financial resources to support the community. Part time workers seem to feel that financial resources are a bigger external threat.

e. Focus Group with Patrons & Volunteers: February 23, 2014

We met with a group of 12 patrons and volunteers of different ages.

Mission:

There was agreement that the library mission is too generic and open-ended. Instead, they offered some suggestions:

Values that they would like to see expressed in a mission statement:

- The library is the only place that really resembles a village well; where everyone comes but everyone takes something different.

The group questioned if the library staff, patron traffic, volunteer participants and book circulation data represent the true DeKalb demographic.

There was also discussion on how we are reaching 30% of the DeKalb residents who speak Spanish (fact not verified by data). How welcoming are we of Spanish residents?

Then discussion moved to why the library exists and how. There was also discussion about how we should be a resource for NIU faculty/staff/students and work with the NIU library. Should we be serving the NIU population who live in DeKalb as well as other DeKalb residents?

Then we talked about why people use the library now, what is the end goal? People come to the library for access to technology. People also need the library for *information literacy*. The role is to assist and instruct people with new information technologies. Why is it important for people to have access: because in order to participate in society people need to understand technology and how to interpret and apply it for life.

For these reasons, librarians are front line for customer service.

Then discussion turned to the physical use of the library for the community to come together. The library is the one community space “where anyone, regardless of age, gender, race, socioeconomic status”.

Why do people come to the library?

- Because of kids
- -Come for reasons other than books but then end up checking out materials when they know what’s here
- come to the library for quiet time to do my studies
- To have a place to separate yourself from home or school
- It’s different than my school or college library, different resources

Strengths:

- Many people mentioned that the children's programs and activities are a clear strength including the story time and summer reading programs.
- Interlibrary loans increased accessibility of materials for DeKalb residents. It is perceived to work very effectively.
- Everyone agreed that staff members, including reference librarians and children's librarians, are excellent; very knowledgeable and helpful.
- Patrons loved having online access to library resources including downloading of e-books.
- People remarked that the public hours of the library were generally good including the expansion of hours on Sunday.

Weaknesses:

- The primary weakness mentioned by this group was lack of overall space but also lack of flexible space (to be used in multiple ways depending on the program). Meeting room space was mentioned for non-library community groups at free or low cost. There would probably need to be a policy about who can use the library for community groups, possibly with priority given to library-associated/community partners etc. Demand will likely outstrip supply.
- There was some discussion about how much physical book shelves to have in the new library versus more flexible environments. With more people accessing digital resources, don't need as many dedicated computers.
- Although, the interlibrary loan system does work effectively there are costs to personnel, the delivery system and time.
- There is limited use of e-readers.
- Another weakness the group felt was pay for staff and competing for staff with other libraries, which is why staff have left the library for other jobs.
- Office space for staff is also a weakness and hopefully will be addressed in the new building.
- The group could not identify the volunteer coordinator for the library if it has one. They felt that this position needed to be more well-known; either part-time or full-time dedicated exclusively to working closely with volunteers including the Friends of the Library.

Opportunities

- The group felt a big opportunity was library volunteers. Although this would take some additional marketing and management, there are many high school and college students who are always seeking volunteer experiences. However, to reach them, the library needs to use technology to recruit volunteers and allow them to apply completely online.
- To increase children and families coming to the library, staff members need to be more receptive to children visiting the library.
- Participants also thought that there was an opportunity to bring the library to more individuals by expanding the bookmobile and outreach services. They suggested a new drive-up to pick up material in the new building and more outreach to area seniors centers

and hospitals.

- They also thought that there was an opportunity to expand the cultural and language diversity in staff, volunteers and programming. This could mean more outreach with local churches or schools and allowing other groups to use library space to display art and cultural artifacts.
- There is an opportunity to work more closely with homeschool groups.
- The children's library section should feature lower book shelves so parents could easily see over book shelves.

Threats

- **Technology:** the question of how much to invest in hard copies, how to select and preserve the hard copies we already own.
- **Whom we serve:** the changing sense of who we serve, the broad spectrum of patrons, question how we should offer programs and services being sensitive to all potential users and languages. Difficult to pull out NIU in Census information to get a sense of the patrons who may not have access to NIU library.
- **Financing:** there is a general dislike for increasing taxes for any reason; DPL is already raising money from other sources. It is challenging to raise money from people for a government unit.
- **Awareness:** there is a general lack of appreciation for public libraries, do not physically borrow materials but may still be accessing other services online or at the library via their own computers/electronic devices. Need to show value for all patrons and potential patrons so library is seen as their community library.

Strategic Issues

- **Financial Resources/Money:** certain people will donate to the capital campaign but what happens after the building construction is underway and ongoing support for the new building and operational needs. There isn't a tradition of giving to the library beyond the tax base. How does the library address this long term? Librarians may not have fundraising expertise to manage this along with other responsibilities. The Friends of the Library has limited capacity to increase fundraising but does have nonprofit status, which you need to qualify for certain grants.
- **Volunteers:** The Friends of the Library sees themselves as primarily a volunteer/support organization for the library, raising limited funds, organizing social events for the Friends.
- **Technology:** Need to maximize use of technology for existing library patrons and to attract new users to the library.
- **Community Outreach:** Are we reaching the demographics the library really wants to serve and has the most to offer?

f. Individual Interviews with Community Partners (March and April 2014)

I met with the following community partners to discuss their partnerships with the library and ideas about the library's strategic plan.

- Northern Illinois University College of Liberal Arts and Sciences External Programming (Mark Pietrowski)
- Altrusa International of DeKalb/Sycamore (Patricia Conway)
- Ellwood House (Brian Reis)
- The Egyptian Theatre (Alex Nerad)
- DeKalb County Community Foundation (Anita Zurburrg)
- Kishwaukee United Way (Dawn Littlefield)

The community partners I interviewed mainly worked with the library on the "Big Read", an annual fall event for the past seven years. This event has brought many community partners together around a common book theme. This partnership is well funded, thanks to fundraising by the library and Altrusa with a grant from the NEA and local sponsors. All of the partners mentioned the Big Read as being the major way they had worked with the library in the past.

All of the partners mentioned when they did have interactions with the library, all of the staff members were easy to work with, very responsive and professional. Sometimes it may be hard to figure out which staff person to contact, but once they did, everything was handled very well.

All of the partners were open to continue working with the library and they were all very excited what a new building might offer the local community in terms of space and joint programming. They would like to be kept informed about the library's progress towards the new building with regular communications about how other groups can get involved. They see this relationship as being mutually beneficial and they would like this aspect to keep growing and strengthening.

Many of the libraries also noted that the library acts as an anchor in the community, a central meeting place and space where the community comes together for various reasons. It has high visibility and is centrally located in the downtown area. Both were reasons why the library should continue to be a community leader in this way, to bring people and groups together.

Overall, all partners were very positive towards the library and were looking forward to their continued partnerships in the future.

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