My Library
the next generation
The Seattle Public Library Strategic Plan

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Purpose of this Strategic Plan

Libraries are on the cusp of a great transformation – or a slow sail into the sunset. Changes in how people access and use information, interact with one another, and in the resources, tools, and capabilities needed to operate effectively in today’s society require new approaches to the services and resources that the Library provides. The Library must evolve in ways that track both the pace of this change and the diversity of our users, ensuring all members of the Seattle community have equal access to the world of ideas.

This Strategic Plan – the result of a vigorous, analytic, and often-times passionate series of conversations about the future of the Library – will guide the Library during a period of internal transition, as well as external societal and technological shifts. The plan is intended to provide vision and direction, staying true to core Library values, as The Seattle Public Library adapts thoughtfully and boldly to emerging challenges and opportunities for the benefit of our patrons.

Planning Process and Inputs

In 2009 The Seattle Public Library completed a decade of building renewal and expansion. The voter-approved Libraries for All capital program renovated or replaced all 22 branches that were in the system as of 1998, added four new branch libraries and built the new Central Library. Library use increased by more than 55 percent over the 10-year period.

Our focus now shifts from buildings to services. The Library Board of Trustees launched a strategic planning process in early 2010 to chart a course that will meet 21st century information needs.

Many individuals and groups shared their ideas, insights, and passions in the development of this plan. The Seattle Public Library is a public institution, funded by the public for the public – and so a great deal of effort went into consulting the public about the future of the Library.

The planning process began in March 2010 with five community open houses held in libraries across the city. More than 240 Library patrons provided input about priorities and new directions the Library should consider. In May, nearly 33,000 people responded to The Seattle Public Library Community Survey, answering questions about their current use of the Library’s resources and buildings and their engagement with Library staff members. In May and June the Library hosted two Public Forums: Technology and Its Impact on the Future of Libraries and The User Experience in the 21st Century Library.

Meanwhile, from April to June, the Library facilitated Focus Groups with service providers who work with children, teens, older adults, immigrants and refugees, and people who are homeless. The discussions focused on brainstorming about how the Library can better serve these populations and the people we serve in common can benefit if we work together in partnership.
Library staff members have been involved throughout the process. They have provided valuable insight into the evolving usage patterns and preferences of Seattle residents. More than half the Library’s employees shared their ideas through an open-ended survey that asked about the future role of the Library, trends and changes in how people use Library resources, and suggestions for new or better ways to serve Library patrons. As the final plan was developed, staff participated in a series of discussion groups to refine the emerging strategies.

Throughout this planning process, the Strategic Plan Project Management Team, a Strategic Planning Advisory Committee, and the Library Board of Trustees met regularly to review the results of these various inputs and to delve into the specifics of many topics including the impact of digital media, community building, and effective partnering.

The Advisory Committee served as a sounding board and source of inspiration, contributing thought-provoking and ambitious perspectives from academia, business, and the nonprofit sector. The Library Board, the Library’s governing body, stewarded the plan, providing input at key junctures and developing the statements of vision, mission and guiding principles that are the foundation for the plan.

The Library Board adopted the plan in February 2011. This Strategic Plan will guide the Library’s efforts and is intended to set an ambitious course for the future of the Library and the enrichment of Seattle’s residents.

The Library is committed to reporting back to the Seattle community on a regular basis about our progress in implementing the plan. We encourage Library users to check the public website for ongoing information, and to continue to let us know how we are doing as we embark on a new era for The Seattle Public Library.

Major Themes of the Plan

Pulling together the threads of this multi-layered exploration, key themes emerged to guide development of the Strategic Plan. Supporting Seattle’s devotion to reading and learning remains the core function of the Library. The content of the Library’s collection is of paramount importance to patrons. We need to aggressively expand digital resources while guaranteeing patrons have access to material in formats they are comfortable with.

Libraries play a central role in Seattle’s communities and neighborhoods. Now more than ever, libraries need to strengthen our democracy by inviting civic engagement through discussion and dissemination of information. Taking this role a step further, The Seattle Public Library should not wait for people to come through its doors, but instead actively reach out to listen to people and connect them with Library resources where they are.

In approaching all of these ambitious goals, it is clear that our Library must team with public, community and business organizations to expand its reach through strategic partnerships. Finally, the Library’s ability to actively enrich the lives of Seattleites requires creation of an organizational culture that encourages thoughtful innovation and experimentation.
GUIDING STATEMENTS

Our Vision for Seattle
A city where imagination and opportunity thrive.

Our Mission
The Seattle Public Library brings people, information and ideas together to enrich lives and build community.
Support intellectual freedom
The Seattle Public Library enables all individuals in our community to exercise their right to access constitutionally protected information.

Promote literacy and a love of reading
Recognizing the vital importance of reading to open doors and expand horizons, the Library strives to support every patron in becoming a lifelong reader.

Protect confidentiality of patron records
The Library respects the confidentiality of our patrons’ requests for information, the online sites they access, and their borrowing history.

Respect and embrace the entire community
We celebrate Seattle’s diversity and strive to ensure that all people feel welcome in the Library. We strive to meet the needs and expectations of every Library patron. The Seattle Public Library actively supports efforts that combat prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination.

Foster a healthy democracy
The Library is committed to building an informed community, and providing neutral ground where participation in civic life is open to all.

Support children and youth
We strive to join parents, educators and young people in helping to raise thoughtful readers and citizens. We recognize the priority of efforts to close educational achievement gaps.

Form strong partnerships
The Library extends its reach and impact in the community through partnerships with individuals, public and nonprofit agencies, community groups, educators and businesses.

Adapt and innovate
To stay relevant to patrons’ changing needs and interests, we continuously adapt what we do and how we do it. We are a learning organization and invest in our staff, technology, and infrastructure to improve service.
SUMMARY OF GOALS & OBJECTIVES

GOAL 1
Fuel Seattle’s Passion for Reading, Personal Growth & Learning

A. Build community around books
B. Strengthen the Library’s contribution to the education of Seattle’s youth
C. Be Seattle’s source for high-quality free instruction and programs to support personal growth
D. Integrate learning into daily life

GOAL 2
Expand Seattle’s Access to Information, Ideas & Stories

A. Lead the nation in providing access to digital material
B. Develop relevant and inspiring collections that meet Seattle’s evolving needs and expectations
C. Drive new models for improving information access and delivery
GOAL 3 Empower Seattle’s Distinctive Communities & Vibrant Neighborhoods

A. Bring Library resources to where people are

B. Establish the Library as a civic focal point and resource hub for Seattle’s communities

C. Adapt spaces and services to support Seattle’s vibrant neighborhoods

GOAL 4 Build Partnerships to Make a Difference in People’s Lives

A. Deploy a systematic approach to partnering that best leverages Library and partner resources

B. Create alliances with government agencies and community groups to benefit Seattle residents

GOAL 5 Foster an Organizational Culture of Innovation

A. Build Library staff and institutional capacity to innovate

B. Use rigorous analysis to provide a positive user experience

C. Manage change with flexibility

D. Communicate and celebrate progress
A. Build community around books
   • Re-imagine the Library’s role in introducing readers to new books and helping readers choose the next book
   • Provide more ways for people to join conversations about books and culture

B. Strengthen the Library’s contribution to the education of Seattle’s youth
   • Lead the movement to provide crucial early learning experiences for Seattle’s young children
   • Ensure every teacher and school administrator is aware of the Library’s ability to provide students with homework assistance, access to technology and diverse collections
   • Develop resources that support school curriculums through collaborative relationships with educators
   • Actively join civic efforts to close educational achievement gaps

C. Be Seattle’s source for high-quality free instruction and programs to support personal growth
   • Ensure the people of Seattle have the skills to find, evaluate and use information
   • Create learning opportunities with public, private and nonprofit partners that maximize the best of Library and community resources
   • Develop intergenerational programming that inspires people to share stories across ages and cultures
   • Expand adult instruction and programming to engage Seattle’s large young adult and growing senior populations

D. Integrate learning into daily life
   • Establish the Library as the first source for practical information on commonly shared life challenges such as parenting, personal finances, education, health and aging
   • Create a platform where librarians, individuals and organizations can exchange knowledge on topics of interest to the community
   • Transform the Library into a learning lab where anyone can experiment with new technologies
Seattle is a city that loves to read, winning the title of “America’s Most Literate City” five out of the past seven years in studies conducted by Central Connecticut State University. The Seattle Public Library pioneered the “one city – one book” concept with the Seattle Reads program, through which the community comes together annually to discuss a book and meet the author. This program has been emulated around the country and internationally.

To thrive today and tomorrow, the Library must help people to access information in new ways. The challenge in this age of information is to be able to efficiently identify what is needed, understand how information is organized, identify the most appropriate sources, evaluate those sources critically, and provide access to the information in formats that are easy to share. The Library is uniquely positioned to do this by drawing on its collection, technology, and skilled librarians to provide multi-layered learning experiences for Seattle.
The single most important attribute predicting greater Seattle’s leadership in civic vitality is its highly educated populace...Existing disparities and underinvestment in educational quality undermine our civic fabric. To maintain greater Seattle’s civic vitality, these dangerous deficits must be remediated...

Greater Seattle Civic Health Index 2010

For many of Seattle’s school-age youth – three-quarters of whom have a Library card – the Library is the place to go after school to meet friends, do homework or use a computer. Unfortunately, others have no idea they could meet personally with a volunteer tutor in many neighborhood branches or get personal help with a tricky math assignment via the Library’s website late at night.

As the Seattle Youth and Families Initiative seeks to bring every available community resource to bear on closing achievement gaps, the Library can actively offer its services as an important part of the solution. Library staff must collaborate with school librarians, teachers, principals and district administrators to support students and their families.
Be Seattle’s source for high-quality free instruction and programs to support personal growth

Every day the Library connects learners to ideas and expands their skills. The Library guides immigrants through the steps to become citizens and taps volunteers to engage in conversations with English language learners. It introduces Seattle to authors from around the world at public readings, provides free computer and job search classes, and much more. In short, the Library builds the human capacity that enables a city to thrive.

We plan to broaden instructional opportunities in ways that maximize the best of Library and community resources. The Library is uniquely suited to spread the skills required to find and use information.

The Library can find creative ways to bring in experts to provide how-to programming that ties to resources in the collection, such as the monthly drop-in health care coverage counseling sessions at the Beacon Hill Branch, provided in English, Cantonese and Mandarin through a partnership with the Chinese Information and Service Center and the Statewide Health Insurance Benefits Advisors. When we spoke to service providers who work with everyone from teens to older adults and immigrants, there was a repeated call for using programming to cross generational lines, and to do a better job of catering to the interests of Seattle’s many young adults.

Integrate learning into daily life

The challenges (and joys!) of parenting, managing personal finances, making health care decisions, and keeping pace with technology are commonly shared life experiences. The Library is poised to support all people in facing such challenges, no matter their education or socio-economic background. “The Library can help reinforce messages on subjects like healthy aging by providing links to the best websites or by holding lecture series,” suggested a focus group participant. Assembling and highlighting topical information might be complemented by having Library staff facilitate online conversations where librarians, individuals and organizations exchange knowledge.

Beyond becoming the source for practical information, the Library must seize the opportunity to become the place where anyone can become tech-savvy. For instance, the Library will develop places where teens can edit and develop audio, video and text for multimedia projects using state-of-the-art technology. Teens aren’t the only ones who want to sample the latest technology, though they are certainly a good group to start with. We see the future Library as a learning lab where people can experiment with a variety of tools to see what might help them to turn ideas into reality and share them with others.
A. Lead the nation in providing access to digital material
   • Build a comprehensive digital collection that is among the best in the country
   • Negotiate with e-publishers to make popular digital material easily available to patrons
   • Take a leadership role in determining the best way for libraries to preserve collections in older formats

B. Develop relevant and inspiring collections that meet Seattle’s evolving needs and expectations
   • Find new and better ways to hear what the public wants in the collection
   • Create and collect original, non-published local interest material such as podcasts of community events and oral histories

C. Drive new models for improving information access and delivery
   • Implement state-of-the-art improvements for a user-friendly website and catalog
   • Re-invent the ways the Library connects information seekers with librarians and resources
   • Provide full access to Library materials for people with disabilities
   • Pilot new ways to showcase, organize and deliver collections drawing on customer feedback and best practices
   • Deliver innovative services such as print-on-demand stations or automated book dispensing machines in targeted locations
Imagine a library, and the picture that comes to mind is one of books on shelves. Yet any active library user knows that image is incomplete. The Seattle Public Library collects books, periodicals, movies and music, and provides many of these materials in print and digital formats along with podcasts and interactive instructional databases. The very definition of “book” is becoming fluid, encompassing formats that may reshape the concepts of author and reader over time.

Seattle residents – nearly 33,000 of whom participated in our Community Survey – are very clear about the value they place on having a strong and diverse collection of Library materials. The consensus, however, does not extend to the formats or focus of that collection. The Seattle Public Library must meet the needs of children born in 2010 who will learn and then invent new forms of information delivery, and expect ubiquitous and immediate access to information, while still meeting the needs of their parents and grandparents. During this time of transition we must maintain an excellent physical collection while we embrace the shift to digital formats. We must also deliver a collection that serves patrons of different economic, educational and cultural backgrounds.
Lead the nation in providing access to digital material

“I can say that The Seattle Public Library is in the top 10 for the largest download collections over our entire library network, both domestically and internationally,” a major e-book distributor reported. This is no time to rest on our laurels, however, and the challenge of satisfying Seattle’s insatiable appetite for information, ideas, stories and entertainment in the Library’s collection is now complicated by the fact that our patrons are at different points on the continuum of preference for physical or digital formats.

We know that patrons encounter technological barriers based on the type of device they own, and the selection is severely limited by restrictions imposed by e-publishers who are reluctant to give libraries full access to popular digital material. With some of the most innovative minds in the technology business, Seattle is uniquely positioned to lead the way in forging new collaborations between libraries and the publishing industry as the standards for digital publishing are established.

As we embrace new formats, the Library must work creatively with other local and regional libraries to develop long-term approaches for preserving, storing and providing ready access to material in older formats.

Develop relevant and inspiring collections that meet Seattle’s evolving needs and expectations

The recession that began in 2009 brought record numbers of job seekers to libraries looking for help. The Seattle Public Library responded by bolstering its resources to help people learn how to revamp their resumes and assess the job market. Interactive databases like “Resume Builder” and “Learning Express Library” now augment a larger and more up-to-date collection in a variety of formats.

My number one request is increased access to digital versions of books in e-book and audio formats. And please can we get these digital assets in open, accessible formats that are not tied to specific platforms?

A patron of The Seattle Public Library

One of the key jobs the Library must do well is to select material that meets patrons’ diverse needs and desires. It must remain a top priority to analyze what our community borrows and anticipate emerging demands. In some cases that means soliciting input from people who are not currently active Library users to identify potential gaps in the collection.
Alongside the core collection of published resources, development of an informal local collection has the potential to make all sorts of fascinating material available to Seattleites. The Central Library’s Hugh and Jane Ferguson Seattle Room already provides a great variety of local historical material. “Neighborhood libraries could be the repositories for the living history of each neighborhood,” according to an advocate for seniors who attended a Strategic Plan focus group. A primarily digital collection of local interest material could not only shed new light on Seattle’s past, but also broaden awareness of the rich culture that makes living in the city so rewarding. From musical performances to podcasts of important debates, the Library will explore opportunities to develop projects and collaborations that expand access to original, nonpublished material of local interest.

Drive new models for improving information access and delivery

As this plan went to press, our cardholders were making the transition to a new online catalog that simplifies searches and allows users to create and share reviews and book lists. We know from our Community Survey that many patrons prefer to help themselves to information, so it’s important to create multiple ways for people to find out what is available, including the catalog and website, in-library displays, and topical blogs.

When patrons become overwhelmed with too many options or need help answering complex questions, our challenge is to build an integrated system that connects people with skilled staff at any time, any place and with any technology. The Library must develop ways to connect people with questions to a system-wide network that makes the best use of staff expertise and resources, whether that means chatting with a local librarian, getting quick help via our online chat reference service, or getting a direct referral to someone who can provide more in-depth assistance.

For people in our community who have disabilities, the Library is a crucial link to information and ideas. We need to recognize that blind and low-vision people still lack access to the majority of books published in the United States, and more than half of Americans with disabilities have no broadband access at home for downloading accessible electronic books. The Library must continually strive to improve access to information for people with disabilities.

Call me old-fashioned, but I still prefer to hold a book and read from it. The smell, the feel, the sound of the pages turning are all so much of my reading history.

A patron of The Seattle Public Library
Empower Seattle’s Distinctive Communities & Vibrant Neighborhoods

A. Bring Library resources to where people are
   • Establish a system-wide, coordinated outreach program to ensure Library staff know and participate in the life of the communities and neighborhoods we serve
   • Use online communities to reach new audiences

B. Establish the Library as a civic focal point and resource hub for Seattle’s communities
   • Convene civic conversations where neighbors have a voice in discussing issues that matter
   • Become the best one-stop source for accurate information about government services
   • Connect our most vulnerable community members with information and services that improve their quality of life
   • Develop dynamic programming, services and spaces shaped by teens for teens
   • Welcome immigrants and refugees with relevant collections, services and connections

C. Adapt spaces and services to support Seattle’s vibrant neighborhoods
   • Charge Library staff to become the go-to contacts for well-rounded, current information on neighborhood activities
   • Develop resources, services and staff to reflect the personality and needs of the neighborhoods we serve
   • Re-shape our policies and practices to maximize patron access to computers, meeting rooms and study areas
   • Employ creative space planning to make Library buildings flexible and responsive to patron priorities as less space is needed to house physical collections
   • Experiment with new ways to harness volunteer energy and capacity
Libraries are the rare locale where people from all walks of life regularly share a space and an experience. The Library provides a safe place that welcomes all comers and encourages exploration. In Seattle’s neighborhoods we can take our commitment to democracy further. We can consciously strive to create opportunities for respectful, lively discourse on matters of civic importance. We can – and must – develop deep knowledge of Seattle’s people and use that knowledge to transform our libraries into practical and creative anchors for community life.
Bring Library resources to where people are

It’s tea time at a senior center, and a group of older Vietnamese residents chat with Library staff about the books they would like to find in our collection. Avid urban gardeners planning a P-Patch on a vacant lot will soon discover a special display of the latest organic gardening resources at their nearby branch. A blog for small business owners reveals an interest in examples of creative joint-marketing efforts – could the local librarian help with some research?

Library staff members build relationships in the community to gain a deeper understanding of the needs and interests of Seattle residents, and foster awareness of Library resources. Outreach efforts include networking with educational, cultural and business groups, and government agencies, participating in community meetings and events, offering offsite programming, promoting the Library as a partner for learning in the schools, and making special efforts to engage individuals and groups who are underserved by the Library. Outreach can occur online, as well.

Making the connections that bring the Library to places and people who might not otherwise come to us takes a commitment of time, effort and training. Over the next few years, the Library will take a much more intentional approach to developing a strategy of community engagement that matches Seattle’s particular neighborhoods and communities of interest.

Establish the Library as a civic focal point and resource hub for Seattle’s communities

The Library aims to provide opportunities online and across the city for people to actively engage in civic life. With information as the starting point, our libraries can be the venues for neighbors to consider issues of local and national importance in a neutral setting that encourages dialogue. For example, the West Seattle and Columbia branches hosted candidate forums during the recent local election season, and in 2010 the Central Library offered several programs that explored the issue of human trafficking from a global and local perspective.

Information is as vital to the healthy functioning of communities as clean air, safe streets, good schools, and public health… Informed communities can effectively coordinate activities, achieve public accountability, solve problems and create connections.

The Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy

Discourse need not occur only in formal programs; we can encourage patrons to view the Library as the place to come for help in organizing informal, impromptu discussion about an immediate event or concern. Shortly after WikiLeaks released documents about the war in Afghanistan, the Library worked with the University of Washington to present a panel discussion and open forum about information transparency.

Many of us use the Library more regularly than we do any other government agency. As a trusted information resource, The Seattle Public Library can help connect residents to our sister government agencies for purely practical matters. Library staff members can help figure out how to register a child for school, check the zoning of a parcel, get on a waiting list for public housing or file papers to run for City Council.
Libraries can be an everyday resource in the lives of Seattle residents. To make that happen, some focused efforts are required. Teens, for example, are some of our most active and savvy users. It is important to give them a say in shaping the programming and services available for them at the Library. We have other patrons who seek out the Library as a place of respite from hard personal challenges. One of the most powerful and life-changing things we can do is connect a person in need with a resource that can help. To fulfill this role well, Library staff members need up-to-date and accurate referral information.

Immigrants and refugees are yet another segment of our population for whom some tailored services can yield great benefits. The 2010 Census is expected to show that nearly 20 percent of Seattle’s population is foreign born. The Seattle Public Library has a well-established immigrant and refugee services program and will strive to more fully realize the goal of engaging immigrants with relevant collections, services and connections.

Library branches should embody what makes Seattle’s communities so vibrant. Library staff members will strive to be recognizable figures, present in the community and knowledgeable about what’s happening. Want to know when the neighborhood business association meets, where to find a regular discussion on sustainability, or contribute to an Irish jam session? Ask a local librarian!

Adapt spaces and services to support Seattle’s vibrant neighborhoods

As staff members listen to the local community, building our capacity to be “go-to contacts” for information, the Library will use that learning to tailor the resources, services, and staff to best meet the needs of the community they serve. While this means you’ll see some adaptive variety across our system, our challenge is to balance responding to neighborhood interests with the strengths of a unified system that ensures branches are familiar and comfortable for all residents, operate according to best practices, and effectively serve the diversity of our entire population.

With more and more people using the Library for everything from job hunting to collaborative group work to quiet study, it is important to look at each location and determine how policies such as those that guide access to computers can be shaped to provide maximum availability to patrons, while ensuring fairness. The Library also needs to embrace the goal of making its spaces flexible and adaptable. In a branch where young people like to congregate for homework and socializing, there should be a place where they can comfortably group around a computer. Elsewhere an arrangement of lightweight furniture might help convert a quiet reading alcove into a book discussion circle – and back again – with little effort or disruption. The desire for such active and flexible spaces can be supported by a decreasing need in the future for rows of bookshelves as we shift to a more digital orientation.

Creative, flexible spaces in future libraries will meet the needs of digital learners who multitask with a number of technologies, while continuing to accommodate the traditional user searching for a printed resource or quiet place to read.

“Checking Out the Future,” American Library Association Office for Information Technology Policy
GOAL 4

Build Partnerships to Make a Difference in People’s Lives

A. Deploy a systematic approach to partnering that best leverages Library and partner resources
   • Develop a partnership plan to build thoughtful ties and provide exciting new services to Library patrons
   • Identify and replicate successful partnerships so more patrons benefit from these collaborations
   • Actively seek opportunities to support the work of city agencies, service providers and cultural groups and customize information for their use

B. Create alliances with government agencies and community groups to benefit Seattle residents
   • Collaborate with partners to provide high-demand public services such as weatherization vouchers, tax help, or health care policy information at libraries
   • Become the first choice location for neighborhood meetings
   • Be a catalyst for civic improvement by convening brainstorming sessions with groups that share the Library’s interest in enhancing social welfare and cultural engagement
If we are to accomplish the ambitious goals that are outlined in this Strategic Plan, The Seattle Public Library must join forces with partners to create new value for the public through teamwork. Even in the best of economic times, there is tremendous untapped opportunity to leverage Library materials, services, building space and staff knowledge by working with public and private organizations that have complementary missions but bring a different set of skills, knowledge and relationships to the table. In a time of constrained resources, the benefit of partnerships becomes even greater.
Deploy a systematic approach to partnering that best leverages Library and partner resources

The Seattle Public Library has worked successfully with many community partners, but recognizes the opportunity to do more. The Library needs to identify the models that work best, strengthen existing relationships and target new ones that enhance our strategic goals. The examples that follow illustrate the types of partnerships the Library seeks to expand or replicate.

- **Cooperative agreements with service providers** facilitate a variety of language learning and citizenship classes that are conducted in Seattle libraries by organizations like St. James ESL Program and Literacy Source. These offerings provide a great tie-in to the Library’s own services for immigrants and refugees. Similarly, the Library works with local social services agencies whose early childhood staff are trained to provide “Play and Learn” sessions for children and caregivers. These sessions occur at Library branches, and librarians participate to help engage young families in actively using Library resources.

- **Special programs tailored to neighborhood interests** often benefit from creative partnering. For example, the Library organized the Urban Self-Reliance series in 2010 at the Capitol Hill Branch, bringing in a different nonprofit, educational or government group each session to address topics such as urban bicycling, canning food, P-Patches and keeping chickens in the city.

- **Arrangements that bring Library expertise to partner clients or members** help the Library make new connections in the community. For example, the Library trained a group of local ethnic media journalists on how to use Library databases that could help them with everything from advertising to searching international press reports. In the Rainier Valley, Library staff members provide computer classes in Amharic and Oromo at the offices of Horn of Africa Services. Librarians are regular presenters at a monthly small business workshop sponsored by the federal Small Business Administration. Participants who encounter Library services this way may be enticed to find out more about what the Library has to offer them.

During the month the art is here, the transformation of the library is amazing. Visual art can be such a quiet talent. With this show and reception the neighborhood tells our students out loud how much we appreciate what they are doing. We can make noise about art in the library!
Teen Librarian Lynn Miller
Teaming with teachers, parent groups and student organizations strengthens the Library’s ability to support learning. Many individual librarians have developed connections with local school librarians and teachers, who bring groups to the Library for research projects or welcome librarians into the classroom to explain how the online collection or homework help services work. The Ballard and Douglass-Truth branches host annual art shows displaying student work, giving patrons a chance to see what’s happening in the neighborhood school. The Library places a high priority on building its relationships in every school and with school district leadership.

Create alliances with government agencies and community groups to benefit Seattle residents

Organizations seeking to reach a wide audience in an attractive, convenient location increasingly look to The Seattle Public Library. If the group provides a free, high-demand service compatible with the Library’s mission – without advertising for-profit activities – we may be able to help with event promotion. For several years, the AARP and the United Way have partnered with the Library to provide free tax preparation help. In 2011, Library users will be able to get tax help at the Central Library and 10 branch libraries for three months leading up to April 15. Recently Seattle’s Office of Emergency Management held a popular seismic retrofitting workshop at the West Seattle Branch. The University of Washington Medical School is partnering with the Library in 2010-11 to provide a series of free medical lectures at the Central Library. The Library can provide great venues and reach a huge segment of the Seattle population who visit the Library’s website, hear about events on the Library’s Facebook page, or simply come upon an activity during a visit to their neighborhood library.

Urban Self-Reliance was a HUGE hit. The program reached out to younger adults on topics that are practical and relevant to them. I really hope to do this program on a wider scale at multiple branches.

Branch Manager Dave Valencia

The Library can help business and community groups by encouraging them to take full advantage of the meeting spaces available in most of our buildings. Through its investment in Libraries for All, Seattle ensured that nearly all Library branches have meeting rooms, providing free space for any non-commercial open meeting. For example, the Ballard District Council meets regularly at that neighborhood library. The Library intends to raise awareness of these free meeting spaces and institute a simpler process for reserving the rooms. There is also interest in being able to use some of the meeting rooms at times when the Library is closed, so the Library will investigate options for making this possible.

Finally, conversations with a range of service providers during the strategic planning process pointed to the value of periodically convening brainstorming sessions with groups that share the Library’s interest in enhancing social welfare and cultural engagement. The Library needs to participate actively in coalitions, and occasionally take a lead role in bringing groups together. The Library can be part of the solution, but we need to sit at the table and join the conversation.
Foster an Organizational Culture of Innovation

A. Build Library staff and institutional capacity to innovate
   • Integrate Library collections, services and programs through collaboration and teamwork across work groups
   • Actively experiment to better serve patrons, implementing successful pilot projects more widely over time
   • Train all staff to be effective promoters of Library resources and services
   • Create a tech-savvy environment where all staff keep pace with advances in the world of information services

B. Use rigorous analysis to provide a positive user experience
   • Upgrade tools for collecting, analyzing and sharing patron statistics, customer feedback, demographic and market research to inform decision-making
   • Establish effective channels for staff and the public to communicate experiences and insights about ways to improve service
   • Develop staff expertise to identify and track major Seattle lifestyle trends so the Library can best align resources with evolving community needs and interests

C. Manage change with flexibility
   • Adapt or pioneer service models that revolutionize the way the Library serves its patrons
   • Assess service strategies and staffing models regularly to ensure the Library is using public dollars wisely to meet the needs of the community

D. Communicate and celebrate progress
   • Provide regular updates of progress in implementing this plan to the Library board of trustees, civic leaders and the public
   • Celebrate accomplishments with staff and community members
“The consequences of our actions are so complicated, so diverse, that predicting the future is a very difficult business indeed.”  Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban, by J.K. Rowling

Our ability to predict what the future will look like is regularly proven inadequate. Perhaps the most valuable outcome of this strategic planning process is that it has required us to contemplate the future of the book and the future of libraries, and forced us to acknowledge the limits of our ability to predict what those futures look like.

What will matter in the end is not that we “get it right” – that we accurately predict the future – but that we prepare ourselves for success in an uncertain future by institutionalizing the ability to continually evolve as our world and the world of our patrons changes. This is not a one-time endeavor, but a commitment to continue to listen, question, challenge, and adapt.
Build Library staff and institutional capacity to innovate

Innovation requires a supportive organizational culture, where focused experimentation is encouraged and rewarded and failures are acknowledged as noble attempts, quickly wrapped up with a record of lessons learned. Efforts that show promise are recognized and supported, moving quickly from a controlled pilot to broader adoption. Innovators can come from all levels of an organization, so paths must be developed and maintained to encourage bright ideas to bubble to the surface. At the same time, evaluation goes hand in hand with experimentation, so part of the cultural shift must be a commitment to think from the outset about how success can be measured.

Beyond creating new ways to delight and serve the public, the whole organization must step up to the challenge of communicating what is available for everyone at The Seattle Public Library. We know that many Seattle residents – both non-users and active Library users – aren’t fully aware of the full extent of Library resources. Our staff members are in constant contact with patrons and partners, and so in the perfect position to be ambassadors for Library services. The Library needs to train staff to integrate targeted “marketing” into each interaction, just as we need to support them in keeping up-to-date with continuous changes in information services technology.

Use rigorous analysis to provide a positive user experience

Data and insights into how patrons use Library services – or about how the makeup of the Seattle population is changing – can help us align offerings with what people want. The Library already makes decisions about collections, staffing needs, operating hours, and other resources based on data that describes how patrons use the system. There’s substantial room for improvement in how we gather this information, compile and analyze it, track trends over time, share the analysis widely among staff, and use it to inform decision-making.

Data about how current users are using current resources cannot tell the Library who isn’t using our system. It can’t tell us what resources they would like but don’t have access to, or could have access to if they only knew about it. The Library needs to make sure we are using effective methods to explore such topics. One priority is to create easy ways for staff and the public to communicate their experiences and suggestions for improvement. Another is to do more outward examination, using analysis of demographic and lifestyle trends among Seattle residents to guide appropriate adaptations by the Library.
The best way to have a good idea is to have lots of ideas.

Dr. Linus Pauling

Manage change with flexibility

The Seattle Public Library is not comfortable with the status quo. We see that our world is changing and will continue to change. This change will bring many challenges, new opportunities, and a constant need to reinvent what we do. As a publicly supported institution, the Library also has a special responsibility to incorporate sound fiscal management into the process of innovation.

To be successful in this world where “everything flows, nothing stands still” (Heraclitus), we have to be flexible, keep a strong connection to Library patrons, and continually critique and reinvent the Library. The Library is committed to reporting to the community on our progress. We will revolutionize what we do in multiple ways in the coming years. Some of the changes will surprise you – some will likely surprise us! – and we will continue to assess everything we do to make sure the Library serves the Seattle community as well and as wisely as possible.
The following groups and individuals contributed to the development of The Seattle Public Library Strategic Plan:

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**The Staff of The Seattle Public Library**
Many other Seattle residents contributed to the plan. Please visit the Strategic Plan page of The Seattle Public Library website (www.spl.org) for the following background reports:

- Citywide Conversations Summary of Comments
- Community Survey Summary
- Focus Group Summaries
- Staff Survey Summary
- Public Forum on “Technology and its Impact on the Future of Libraries” podcast and summary
- Public Forum on “The User Experience in the 21st Century Library” podcast and summary

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