



CRANSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY STRATEGIC PLAN

2014-2019

APPROVED BY BOARD OF TRUSTEES FEBRUARY 12, 2014

PLANNING TEAM

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The economic climate in the city of Cranston, which was the focus of conditions in the last two library strategic plans, has begun to improve. Although the city and state still have high unemployment, the library can begin to look towards the future. In 2012, the library hired a new Director, Edward Garcia after the retirement of David Macksam. This transition was the primary delay in starting the strategic planning process.

The library's role in the 21st century has dramatically been altered from the traditional view of libraries throughout history and particularly the library as we have come to know it. Today, the library is a community center, a place for lifelong learning to take place, an educational place for children and new Americans, a technology hub, and a gateway for user-driven services. There is no doubt that the Cranston Public Library has and will continue to meet those roles. By undertaking a thorough planning process, the library has established what services and changes the community requires now and into the future. To every extent possible, we will attempt to build on the accomplishments of the 2009-2011 Strategic Plan.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Renovated and opened new Arlington branch library at the Cranston Senior Center
- Re-designed Cranston Public Library website
- Renovated circulation department with new circulation desk at Central Library
- Conducted community assessment
- Updated network infrastructure and wireless access at four locations

ACCOMPLISHMENTS (CONTINUED)

- Established staff intranet
- Installed high definition digital audiovisual system at Central Library
- Established Chinese language print and media collection
- Installed new HVAC system at the Central Library
- Installed new energy efficient lighting at the Central Library
- Installed new inverter for emergency lighting at William Hall Library
- Added an extra day to the summer hours at all branch locations
- Established 501c3 Cranston Public Library Association
- Launched circulating eReader collection
- Invested in 3D printing technology and training
- Launched a monthly e-newsletter that is distributed to the public
- Partnered with Broadband RI to design a digital literacy curriculum

The Library's Mission

The Cranston Public Library brings people, information and ideas together to enrich lives and strengthen the community.

The Library's Values

We strive to provide:

- Library services that are known and valued by the community, resulting in broad use by the public.
- An engaging cultural and lifelong learning center for the community.
- Services and collections that are readily accessible and easy to use and that is relevant to community needs
- An enthusiastic, well-trained and highly capable staff that works well together to provide quality service to all library users.
- Facilities that are inviting and well maintained.
- Technology that expands and enhances service.
- Timely and accurate information that informs and empowers the public.
- Defense of intellectual freedom and the confidentiality of each individual's use of the library.
- A close working relationship with other libraries, community agencies and organizations that fosters cooperation, making the most efficient and effective use of taxpayer resources.
- A variety of early childhood programs that bring families together and foster a love of reading.
- A relevant collection of print and non-print materials that meet the developmental needs of Cranston's youth.
- Collaboration and support for parents and teachers as schools adopt the Common Core state standards.
- Programs for preteens and teens.
- The annual Summer Reading program which focuses on making reading and

literacy-related programs fun and accessible for children of all ages to help avoid summer reading loss.

STRATEGIC THEMES

Strategic Theme #1

Evaluation of building and collection layouts to encourage maximum access to library resources and reduce patron confusion.

Goal

Create tools for each library in the CPL system to assess and modify floor layout, collections, and equipment in order to enhance the patron experience; offer clear navigation of library resources both in the library and online; and consistently evaluate and modify the appearance of the library to accommodate changing patron needs.

Rationale

In the community assessment, it was noted that the number one barrier to library use in the CPL system was “intimidation (physical layout of the library, perception of the library, cultural issues.)” Also mentioned in the community assessment were collections (more new books, more teen books, especially books geared towards boys), the children’s room layout, comfortable spaces, quiet spaces, and lack of space in general. Staff observations note that patrons are often confused about where collections are located (fiction, mystery, nonfiction, movies, etc.), how the library is set up (Dewey Decimal system is not clearly defined in the library), where they can “plug in”, and even mundane things like where the bathrooms, meeting rooms and drinking fountains are located and where to find the Administration Office.

Potential Strategies for implementation:

- Ask staff to evaluate the current layout of the library and its resources and to identify which questions patrons are consistently asking.
- Survey of patrons.
- Look at best practices or case studies of other library systems.
- Work with Ocean State Libraries (OSL) to maximize the catalog as a finding aid.
- Review signage and investigate signage best practices.
- Renovate children and teen areas to accommodate a range of ages and activities, including play, research, and browsing.

Strategic Theme #2

Evaluate the continued viability of the branch library system.

Goal

Conduct an environmental scan of each branch location, as well as their relationship with the library system as a whole.

Rationale

Cranston Public Library has the second largest branch library system in Rhode Island with six locations. The buildings at many of these locations are over 70 years old. With the increased strain on library budgets due to economic conditions, a scan of each location is necessary to evaluate usage and capital improvement needs. The scan will then provide data for a full plan to maximize funding and reach of the library system. Ultimately, the result will utilize the unique characteristics and neighborhood demographics of branch locations to formulate a five-year plan for capital funding requests, and recommendations for any branch eliminations if necessary.

Potential Strategies for implementation:

- SWOT analysis (strength, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) of each branch library

Strategic Theme #3

Foster Community Connections

Goal

Youth and adults of the community will have opportunities outside the library to develop literacy skills, and enjoy educational, recreational and cultural programs.

Rationale

Library services are not necessarily within the confines of a building anymore. An increasing number of people access the library via electronic devices. People may have less time and/or mobility to visit a library facility. In order to remain vital in the community and fully serve community members, the library needs to be where the people need it and when they want it.

Potential Strategies for implementation:

- *Continue to expand work with Cranston Family Center and other similar organizations.*
Reach populations of children enrolled in Title I schools and families that are facing issues that may affect children's growth and development.
- *Continue to expand work with homebound patrons and those with limitations that prevent them from visiting their local library branches.*
- *Expand collaborations between Cranston Public Library and Cranston Public Schools.*
Develop good communication between the school department and the library, as well as easy access to classrooms, to promote public library resources and programming for students and educators.
- Pursue partnerships with organizations such as Whole Foods and REI, to provide family and adult programming outside of the library.
- Investigate assigning full or part-time staff to assist in community outreach and programming.
- Establish a web team to coordinate disseminating the library's message via the library website, social media, library newsletter, and other outlets.

Strategic Theme #4

Create a comprehensive marketing and public relations plan to raise the profile of the library in the community and the state.

Goal

Establish relevant guidelines and assign shared responsibility for all library locations.

Rationale

It is essential for the Cranston Public Library to be proactive and market its services and resources to effectively bring attention to our libraries, the services we offer and demonstrate our value to the community, our stakeholders, our financial supporters and the public.

Potential Strategies for implementation:

- Create a web team
- Establish strategies for press releases, website, social media postings, flyers, online calendars, etc.
- Maintain consistency in paper flyers, posters, brochures & handouts
- Hire a marketing professional to provide direction, coordinate across the system, and create materials for special events

Strategic Theme #5

Develop assessment strategies for measuring the effectiveness of the library's services, programs, and technology that can be used to develop and maintain current and future library services.

Goal

To institute ongoing but simple assessment tools that can measure quantitative and qualitative data from programs, technology use, services, and staff that will help the library to create or modify programs and services for greater success and to help maximize library resources.

Rationale

Although the library budget has increased slightly from last year, it is still important for the library to concentrate on finding ways to maximize resources and provide services and programming that is targeted to the population, with proven effectiveness. To date, the library has focused on attendance as the primary assessment method for determining programming effectiveness. Given the great response to the library needs assessment among community members and the expression of various stakeholders that continued input would be valued, the library could benefit from the development of assessment tools for measuring the effectiveness of programs, technology, and library services. Such tools could help the library re-configure or eliminate services that are not working and possibly solicit feedback from the community before programs are created, eliminating wasted time and resources on services that are not a priority in the community. In addition, these tools could help to build off the services that are successful by gathering important data about why they are successful and using those strategies in the future. This new focus on data-driven assessment will allow the library to continually make decisions based on community input, ensuring that library services are relevant to the target population and responsive to the needs of the greater community.

Potential Strategies for implementation:

1. Assessing patron technology use by employing the Edge Initiative.

- According to their website, their toolkit “gives libraries a look into their local data, from operations to partnerships and programming, to assess how their community is using the technology and how best practices can be put into place to align future growth and services with community priorities. It also provides useful resources to package and showcase the data to other community leaders.” This initiative will provide assessment benchmarks, resources, and training for librarians.

2. *Assess patron technology use using an Impact Survey.*

- According to their website, “the Impact Survey is an online survey tool designed specifically for public libraries that want to better understand their communities and how people use their public technology resources and services. Written and validated by research staff at the University of Washington Information School, the Impact Survey is designed to quickly and easily provides busy librarians with useful data on how their patrons use library technology services. The program saves libraries the time and costs associated with writing, programming, analyzing, and reporting an in-house survey.”

3. *Assess programming using short paper surveys.*

- Assess patron interest in current and future programs
 - Sample survey questions:
 1. How did you learn about this program?
 2. Would you like to see more programs like this? Any ideas?
- Assess staff technology use with an electronic survey sent via email.
- Assess staff satisfaction levels in the workplace with a paper or electronic survey.

Strategic Theme #6

Provide technology access and training.

Goal 1

Offer staff trainings to improve staff technology competencies.

Goal 2

Evaluate current technology class offerings.

Rationale

As the public becomes more dependent on technology in their daily lives, they are increasingly looking to the library to assist them in navigating the often-confusing and quickly-changing world of mobile devices and apps, as well as for instruction in basic digital literacy skills. It is crucial that the Cranston Public Library has a well-trained staff that is comfortable assisting the public with their technology needs.

Potential Strategies for implementation:

1. *Establish a technology learning space.*

- It is difficult to schedule more computer classes at the current time, because there are many departments and outside groups that share the meeting room space that is currently used for the classes. In addition, the mobile lab takes time to maintain, set up and put away. Also, laptops are regularly used by the branch libraries, other staff members, and the literacy program, making management of the lab difficult. A more permanent set-up is necessary if we wish to expand our current course offerings.

2. *Establish regular days and times for staff technology trainings.*

- Because many of our staff are part-time and staff public service desks, it can be difficult for them to attend the occasional training sessions as they currently exist. Setting a regular day and time would enable supervisors to schedule staff in a way that would allow them to attend the training sessions.

3. *Offer computer classes at the branches.*

- A permanent computer lab at Central would allow us to disperse the laptops to the branches and expand our technology classes beyond the Central Library.
- Offer a charging station (or area) where patrons can plug in their devices.

4. *Identify/hire additional technology instructors and support staff.*

- There are currently only a few staff members who teach technology classes. Two instructors for *most* technology courses is a best practice, as the students all learn at a different pace and come to the class with various degrees of comfort and experience in using computers. This creates a time and staffing crunch that makes it difficult to expand the days, times, and number of class offerings. Several part-timers and branch staff are adept at using current technology, but scheduling issues prevent us from using them more often in this capacity. With only one full-time staff member dedicated to technology troubleshooting, training, and repair, there is a need for additional support in this area. Offering regularly scheduled, off-desk hours for one or more staff members to support the library's technology training and troubleshooting needs should be a priority.
- Investigate a service for patrons to pay for library fines and services using credit cards, debit cards, or a universal library service card. Currently, patrons must have cash or coins to pay for printing, copying, ear buds, book sale items, bags, and candy at the circulation desk. Using a Square wireless credit card reader is one solution, however a dedicated library bank account would need to be established.
- Continue to improve and evaluate the library's broadband and wireless access and infrastructure.

- Establish a digital literacy program for ESL learners as outlined in the community assessment.

Strategic Theme # 7

Build a community of empowered young readers.

Goal

Children in kindergarten through grade 2 will have access to collections tailored to them and programs that emphasize choice and the social aspects of reading.

Rationale

Longtime emphasis on early literacy programs has raised their profile, but libraries need to better serve children in kindergarten to second grade and to support them as they do the hard work of learning to read. Reading is a survival skill in our information-rich society and children who develop this skill by third grade are much more likely to succeed in school and in life. Many organizations offer an educational approach to reading. The library has a unique niche as a provider of a vast array of materials at this level, accompanied by expert advice. Only we are in a position to really give children a choice and allow them to read books that reflect their interests, leading them to identify as readers and make connections to other people through books.

Potential Strategies for implementation:

- Offer a beginning reader book club program that bridges the gap between early literacy programs and elementary school programs.
- Expand and reorganize the beginning reader collection to make it easier for kids to browse.
- Streamline the summer reading program to make it easier for children who are learning to read to participate with minimum adult help.
- Create online resources for parents to help them find books their beginning readers will enjoy and give them strategies to support their child's reading development.

Strategic Theme #8

Increase access to new and popular book titles

Goal

Reduce the wait time for popular titles and increase patron satisfaction by meeting the demands of our readers.

Rationale

In the community assessment, lack of access to new bestsellers was seen as a Critical Issue. Patrons “often wait months to gain access to newer titles” and often go to other libraries to get new materials more quickly. While there are other places where people can get access to audiovisual media, like Redbox, Amazon, Netflix, and YouTube, the library has a unique role in providing free access to print media. Savvy patrons who know what they are looking for are able to place holds ahead of time but still have to wait with hundreds of other patrons on the holds list. Patrons who come to the library looking to discover new titles by looking at our new book display are not exposed to these books because bestsellers never make it to these shelves.

Potential Strategies for implementation:

- Investigate ways of increasing the materials spending budget.
- Using statistics in the Annual Report and the state’s Comparable Statistics, highlight the discrepancy between our circulation figures and funding for new books and materials.
- Working with coordinators, investigate spending and circulation patterns and look for ways to re-evaluate budget allocations (for periodicals, etc.) to better meet demands.
- Consider creating a separate collection for new titles with different loan rules, i.e. 7-day loan with no system-wide holds allowed.
- Increase the frequency with which we order new titles and evaluate tech services workflow to streamline processing & cataloging to reduce wait times.
- Investigate creative new ways of getting the public involved in expanding our best sellers collection for example, giving reader incentives for donating new bestsellers, adding best sellers to our Amazon Wish List, partnering with retailers or having patrons donate to a special fund just for best sellers.