

HUMBOLDT COUNTY LIBRARY STRATEGIC PLAN 2004 – 2009

BACKGROUND

MISSION

The Humboldt County Library provides resources and opportunities to support lifelong learning, local heritage, and the cultural, recreational, and information needs of our communities.

Humboldt County has a long and distinguished history of public library service. In 1878, Eureka became the first city in California to support a free public library with public funds. Arcata followed soon after, and in 1910, Ferndale opened its new Carnegie library.

In 1915, the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors established the County Free Library to serve county residents outside the cities of Eureka, Ferndale and Arcata. Five branches were established: Blue Lake, Fortuna, Garberville, Trinidad, and Willow Creek. Additional branch libraries were opened at McKinleyville (1916), Rio Dell (1919), and Hoopa (1927). The older libraries in Arcata and Ferndale became affiliated with the county system and in 1972, Eureka's public library and the Humboldt County Libraries were consolidated into one system.

Today, the Humboldt County Library, in cooperation with local jurisdictions, serves all County residents through a networked structure of ten branches, a bookmobile, and a central library facility.

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

Since 1878, citizens in Humboldt County have recognized the value of free public library service and affirmed the library as a critical community service. To remain a vital institution into the future, the library must be in a continual process of change and revitalization.

In January, 2003 the Board of Supervisors authorized the formation of the County Library Task Force: a 14 member committee of elected officials, community members, and library staff. The charge of the group was to create a vision and goals to guide the library through the next five years, explore alternative funding options, and gather community input on library services. Each member of the group represented a specific jurisdiction or area within Humboldt County; however, the planning process centered on the library system as a whole.

County Library Task Force

In a series of six meetings, the task force worked with a volunteer facilitator and incorporated concepts from a national planning model for libraries: the American Library Association's *Planning for Results*. This model emphasizes designing library services based on community need and defining "service responses" or priorities that best respond to those needs. Public participation is also an essential part of this planning model. As part of the process, the task force gathered input on library services through surveys and community forums. (see Appendices A & B).

First, the task force studied the current structure, operations, and funding of the county library system and grappled with the difficult issue of providing library service in a climate of continually rising costs and declining revenues. Several key challenges emerged in an attempt to set service priorities for the next five years:

Key Challenges:

- Local income per capita for library services is \$12.36; compared to \$22.05 for comparable California county libraries and \$23.20 national average*
- Per capita operating expenditure for HCL is \$16.70; compared to \$25.42 for comparable California county libraries and \$26.42 national average*
- Open hours are well below recommended standards
- Library staffing remains 27% below 1977 levels
- When funded, the library's materials expenditures per capita is \$1.03 (including fundraising) as compared to the statewide mean of \$2.99 and the national mean of \$3.76*
- The library serves the largest geographic area of any California library in its population group

*figures based on fiscal year 2001

Source: California State Library; Public Library Data Service Statistical Report 2001

Acknowledging the fiscal constraints and challenges under which the library operates, the task force moved on to define the optimum future for the library and to articulate a vision statement. The task force characterized a vital community library for Humboldt County as follows:

- The library is on par with other community arts and cultural organizations
- The library is a primary county-wide information resource
- The entire community uses the library and is aware of its services
- There are no geographical barriers to library service
- Welcoming, accessible facilities, convenient open hours, high quality, diverse collections, and programs on topics of local interest establish the library as a destination in the community
- The library uses technology appropriately in support of its mission
- Well-trained, knowledgeable, and friendly staff assist the public in finding answers to questions related to work, school, and personal life
- The library plays a major role in fostering life-long learning for all ages
- The main library is a repository of local history and genealogical resources
- The library is a high-profile community institution that has strong political support
- The library has a strong, stable funding base from a mix of public and private sources

The resulting vision statement is intended to capture the group's expressions of what the library should be:

VISION

The Humboldt County Library is a place of opportunity and a source of community pride, offering and protecting the heritage of the past as well as the promise of the future.

Strategies for Achieving the Vision

Correlating community input with the work of the task force resulted in six fundamental issues that the library must address to effectively achieve its mission and move towards the vision for the future. These issues are the basis of the library's strategic plan for 2004-2009.

STRATEGIC ISSUES

Access

Quality

Opportunity

Community Awareness & Involvement

Technology

Sustainability

Each strategic issue includes goals and related activities or action steps. Specific strategies and recommendations of the task force have been incorporated into the goals and activities and are further defined in Appendix C.

STRATEGIC ISSUE: ACCESS

Goal: Provide Library Facilities that are Open and Accessible to All

Activities:

1. Increase open hours system-wide
2. Work with communities to plan and implement new or improved library facilities
3. Conduct patron survey on appropriateness and convenience of existing library open hours at each location
4. Revise guidelines for main library meeting room use and publicize availability to community organizations

Goal: Redesign public spaces to be more inviting, safer and more comfortable for people to use

Activities:

1. Improve space utilization at all library locations
2. Explore the conversion of existing space to quiet study rooms at the main library
3. Conduct a feasibility study on placing a coffee shop or coffee cart at the main library
4. Provide bi-lingual signage in branch communities with Spanish speaking populations
5. Update or provide new adaptive technologies for disabled

Goal: Provide easier and quicker access to materials in demand

Activities:

1. Explore bestseller rental programs and sponsorship opportunities to increase availability of high interest items
2. Initiate ordering process that will expedite the arrival of high demand items
3. Investigate patron self-service options such as holds pick-up and self-check-out
4. Create 'new arrivals' section in all branch libraries
5. Evaluate the organization and display of collections to foster easy accessibility and encourage public browsing

STRATEGIC ISSUE: QUALITY

Goal: Develop and maintain library collections that are current and relevant to the needs and interests of communities

Activities:

1. Increase funding for new books and materials to the level of comparable California libraries
2. Revise and update the collection development and maintenance policy
3. Conduct an assessment of library collection
4. Promote library's online and paper 'new book suggestion' form
5. Solicit input from subject area specialists in the community

Goal: Improve customer service for all patrons

Activities:

1. Establish customer service standards for public service desks
2. Conduct cross-training of library public service staff
3. Provide at least two staff development sessions for public service staff per year
4. Develop and provide library card application forms and other library communications in Spanish
5. Review and revise public service policies and procedures

STRATEGIC ISSUE: OPPORTUNITY

Goal: Increase educational and cultural program opportunities and exhibits for adults county-wide

Activities:

1. Work with library support organizations to sponsor educational and cultural programs at each library location
2. Collaborate with local educational and cultural institutions to host a program series annually
3. Increase Internet and computer catalog training for public
4. Work with county and city departments to create a system-wide exhibit and/or program schedule featuring topics of community interest or controversy

Goal: Provide opportunities for residents to explore local heritage

Activities:

1. Expand collaborative activities with the Humboldt County Historical Society
2. Support efforts to digitize local and regional cultural resources

Goal: Actively support literacy programs for all ages

Activities:

1. Continue collaboration with the Humboldt County Children & Families Commission to identify and implement enhanced services to children 0-5 and their families
2. Develop an outreach program for seniors
3. Collaborate with the Humboldt Literacy Project and other organizations in presenting family literacy programs and supporting adult literacy activities

STRATEGIC ISSUE: COMMUNITY AWARENESS & INVOLVEMENT

Goal: Increase public awareness of library programs and services and promote the library as a gateway to community

Activities:

1. Conduct a library card drive to increase patron registration by 10 % county-wide
2. Implement a Speaker's Bureau to make library presentations to educational institutions, service clubs, other community agencies
3. Create and implement strategies for marketing reference services to the business community
4. Create and seek sponsorship for two promotional campaigns per year
5. Contract the design of an official library logo
6. Create informational 'welcome' brochures or packets to promote library services in English and Spanish
7. Revise and redesign library web page to be more appealing and informative
8. Work with cities and county to provide or improve directional road signs to the library in each community
9. Create a community events bulletin board or kiosk at each branch location

Goal: Increase opportunities for citizen involvement and strengthen connections with local government jurisdictions

Activities:

1. Establish county-wide 'comment card' or mechanism for patron input on library facilities and services
2. Create a permanent advisory board
3. Initiate regular reports to the governing boards of branch library jurisdictions
4. Formalize practices for allocating resources to branch libraries
5. Update or implement agreements with branch library communities

STRATEGIC ISSUE: TECHNOLOGY

Goal: Support current and emerging technology to increase access to information, improve efficiency and enhance patron use of the library

Activities:

1. Upgrade telecommunications structure to improve performance of existing network and support future technological enhancements.
2. Budget for the replacement outdated technological equipment
3. Participate in shared online database subscriptions with North State Cooperative libraries
4. Implement 24/7 online reference service through the North State Library Cooperative
5. Investigate the appropriateness of new technologies for a library setting
6. Develop and implement 4-year technology plan in conjunction with County IT Department

STRATEGIC ISSUE: SUSTAINABILITY

Goal: Explore and develop alternative funding strategies to provide resources beyond property tax revenues

Activities:

1. Foster collaborative partnerships with public and private sector
2. Present strategies for sustainable funding sources to Board
3. Seek grants to support activities identified in strategic plan

Goal: Work with library support organizations to maximize potential

1. Continue to work with library support groups to improve service through enhanced funding
2. Participate in strategic planning for the Humboldt Library Foundation
3. Sponsor annual forum for all Friends of the Library groups
4. Cultivate 'Friends of the Library' organizations in branch library communities that do not have a dedicated support group

COMMUNITY FORUMS

Between August and October, library administrative staff conducted eleven forums: one at each branch library community. Meetings were open to the public and were designed to gather information on how library service is currently meeting the needs of the community and where residents would like to see the library direct its energies for the future. Participants were also asked to prioritize the primary goals defined by the County Library Task Force and complete a survey related to the planning process (see Appendix B).

Although each community was different and expressed unique needs, there were many common characteristics. The following comments and concerns were expressed at each community forum:

Patrons value:

- library as information provider
- connection to main library and whole collection
- ability to request materials(in and out of county)
- computers and Internet access
- knowledgeable and accessible staff
- library as 'place'
- local history resources and role
- children's programs

Patrons are concerned about:

- possible closure
- funding
- return of bookmobile service

Patrons would like to see:

- more hours at their branch location
- more main library hours
- more new books system-wide
- improved facilities (accessible, more space)
- more community involvement / promotion
- staggered hours within branch network

The forums also affirmed the importance of the branch library network. The library is an essential service in the outlying areas and for many communities (such as Garberville and Willow Creek) it is the most visible connection to the County. Generally, branch library patrons are very grateful to have a library in their community and have fewer concerns and demands. Branch collections are more up-to-date and better maintained, the schedule of open hours suits communities better, and residents tend to have a personal connection to the library and its staff.

Patrons county-wide expect more from the main library in terms of collections, access and services, however. Staff received high marks, but there is a very high level of dissatisfaction with main library open hours and the lack of new materials.

COUNTY LIBRARY TASK FORCE STRATEGIES & RECOMMENDATIONS

▶ Increase City/Community Involvement

The task force recommends an increase in communication between the County Library and the jurisdictions it serves. The benefits of increased communication include greater public awareness of library services and higher visibility of the library in the community; more opportunities for citizen input; greater support and cooperation between jurisdictions. Recommended strategies for improving city/community involvement include:

Regular Reports to Jurisdictions

In addition to the library's practice of sending a print annual report to the governing boards of each branch library community, it is recommended that library staff present information annually at a regular meeting or study session.

Advisory Board

A permanent advisory board comprised of representatives from each council or branch library community and a representative from the Board of Supervisors is recommended. The Advisory Board would work in cooperation with the County Librarian in matters of library policy and would act as the liaison between the library and the community. The Board would be advisory only; governing authority would continue to rest with the Board of Supervisors.

▶ Standardize Resource Allocations

Currently, the library allocates resources to its branches based on a set of criteria which includes: population of the service area; circulation or use of library; distance from the main library and available resources. The task force discussed formalizing these practices and potentially standardizing this structure to ensure an equitable distribution of resources. Providing a base allocation to each branch that is calculated according to a formula that may include population, circulation and assessed value is recommended as a potential strategy. Communities desiring services above and beyond what the county can provide could then contract with the county for enhanced services. This model has worked well for other multi-branch county libraries in the state.

▶ Foster Collaborative Partnerships

The library should continue to explore alternative funding strategies to provide resources beyond property tax revenues. Collaborative partnerships between public and private are encouraged. Sample strategies are included below:

1. Partnerships between county, city and support organizations for enhanced services.

A 3-way partnership in which the county, city and library support group (Friends or Foundation) match funds to improve services, such as increased open hours.

2. Partnership between city, county and re-development agency

The city, county and re-development agency match funds targeted for a specific purpose, such as increased open hours.

3. Contracts with Cities / Communities

The county provides a base allocation of resources (see above). Communities desiring more open hours, materials or services contract with the county to fund the enhanced services.

► Secure Sustainable Funding

The task force acknowledged that true progress towards fulfilling the library's mission and vision will depend on sustained, dedicated funding. The task force recognized that there may not be one solution that fits for each community in increasing the financial capacity of its local branch library. The intent is to provide a range of strategies for consideration by the County as a whole or by each individual community for its appropriateness and feasibility.

1. Sales Tax

State law allows an increase of 1/8 - 1/4 cent sales tax increase for the purpose of funding library services.

2. Parcel Tax

3. Benefit Assessment

4. Utility Users Tax Earmarked for Libraries

Cities that collect utility users' tax would appropriate a % for library service.

5. Transient Occupancy Tax Earmarked for Libraries

The Board of Supervisors and/or City Councils would earmark a % of transient occupancy tax for library service.

