

2012

5 Year Strategic Plan

Hillsdale Free Public Library

A blueprint for success. A document for conversation. An eye on the future.



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5 Year Strategic Plan

I. Introduction

The challenge presented to the Library is to maintain its relevance to the community given a rapidly changing technology environment and ongoing severe budget constraints. The plan will provide guidance to the Library Board and staff to identify, prioritize, and implement a broad range of services, programs, and general areas of development. It is a communication tool intended to be flexible, revised as necessary, with provision to quantify improvements.

The document is divided into goals and objectives. A goal is a broad concept. Within each goal are specific, tangible and measurable objectives. An example of a broad goal would be “increase the use of the Library.” A specific measurable objective might be to provide delivery service to the homebound. Objectives may apply to more than one goal.

Early in 2011, the Library conducted a comprehensive self-selecting survey. The summary of survey is presented as an appendix. Consideration of the primary concerns presented by the survey are reflected in many of the objectives throughout the plan.

II. Funding

Statement on Municipal funding

From 2001 until 2010 the library received substantial annual increases in its municipal support due primarily to the growth of the real estate market and the 1/3 mil funding formula that provides a floor for municipal funding. With the collapse of the market in 2008 and subsequent devaluation of real estate, the mandatory support has declined to 2006 levels with low probability for any increase in the coming years. Combined with escalating healthcare and other fixed increases the Library’s ability to provide robust collections and services diminishes. It is imperative that the Library pursue all available means of revenue, while advocating for continued municipal support.

As of 2011, municipal support accounts for 91% of revenue; fines 3%; net-lender 2%. The remainder is raised through donations, used book sales, photocopy and print fees, and other small fees.

Friends of the Library

The Friends of the Library provide financial support for all library activities. The bulk of funds are derived from annual membership drives and used book sales. The Friends are a 501c (3) organization. The Friends have the opportunity to expand their ability to provide funding through raffles, more frequent book sales, and expanding the membership base.

Over the last 5 years the Friends have supported the annual summer reading program, started the foreign and documentary DVD collections, and donated beautiful benches for the patio. They have also initiated a movie festival and have funded many special programs. Although credited for these activities, it is unclear if the Friends are recognized for their support by the community.

- Provide more opportunities to showcase Friends activities and accomplishments. (labeling, bulletin boards, relocated/updated donor boards)
- Encourage the Friends to apply for a games of chance license so that raffles can be held. This activity could tie in with local vendors.
- Permit more perks for Friends much like the original Oops card.
- Improve branding of Friends' initiatives
- Utilize bookmarks to promote Friends activities / memberships

Memorial Book Plates

From time to time families have selected the Library as the designated charity to memorialize a loved one. A form has existed for a long time and it was placed on the website, but the opportunity is little publicized.

- Ensure that donors are aware that items may not remain a permanent part of the collection due to age or damage. Memorials can remain permanent by creating a new webpage that records the items contributed to the library and for whom they

were given. The ability to see the items that were purchased may inspire others to donate in a similar manner.

- Publicize the possibilities in a positive manner.

Used Book Management

The Library realizes \$2,500 to \$3,500 in used book sales annually from the bookcase in the foyer. Periodic book sales for the Friends typically nets \$450 to \$750 per weekend. Handling the volume of donations is a challenge all its own.

- Identify opportunities to improve handling of used book sales to maximize financial benefit.
- Establish a consistent book sale schedule or partner with a used book service.

Bequest – The Big Ask

The library will benefit from the promotion of bequests and memorials. Memorials may include bookplates, room dedications, and “living” memorials such as programs supported with donated funds.

Several local libraries, including Montvale and Maywood, received substantial funding through bequests.

- The Library shall cultivate relationships with individuals.

Strategic Partnerships with Neighboring Municipalities

The Library Board will monitor and investigate potential joint activities and/or shared services with surrounding communities that would be of benefit to the Hillsdale Free Public Library.

III. Community Reach

Increasing membership and general use of the library collection and facility is a primary goal of this document.

In 2010, 5,740 individuals were registered library users. Of those, 3,671 borrowed at least one item during the year. The percentage of active cardholders remained flat from 2006 through 2010 at 36-37%, while circulation increased 9% . Circulation figures do not capture those residents that use the library exclusively for internet access, the photocopier, or the fax machine.

The Library shall strive to demonstrate its value to the community, and thereby secure both political support and additional financial support in the form of donations.

According to the 2010 census, there are 10,219 residents in Hillsdale. Of these, 2,700 are under 18 years of age or 27%! Another 21% is over age 50. Those between 34 and 49 years of age represent 24%. Only 11% of the population is between the ages of 20 to 34.

Form Strategic Partnerships with Community Organizations

The Library has already established relations with many community groups and organizations. Eagle Scouts contribute service. Groups utilize the meeting room. Charities successfully use the lobby as a collection point. Schools co-sponsor book clubs. The Sundial Garden Club maintains the patio planter. The Library shall document these connections and cultivate additional relationships within the community.

- Create and maintain a list of all organizations within the Library's service area
- Conceive and promote mutually beneficial service opportunities

Solicit Feedback

The Library cannot continue moving forward without the support and direction of the people it serves. The online survey in 2011 captured the opinions of only 229 participants. Perhaps the most difficult population to reach is that of the “non-user.” Those that believe they do not need a library, or those that do not know what the Library has to offer them.

Other than the occasional complaint or compliment from existing users, the Library receives little feedback from the public.

- The Library shall provide several means by which the public can comment on current and proposed services (on-line form, e-mail, survey, old-time suggestion box)
- The Board and staff shall actively solicit opinion in a variety of situations such as Town Day, Memorial Day Parade, open houses, and regular library programs.

Publicize in All Media

The Library currently promotes programs and services via press release, flyer, bookmark, borough newsletter, list-serv, blog post, Facebook, Twitter, the borough sign and the old-fashioned sign on the front lawn. The Library shall continue to do so and focus on:

- Uniformity of the brand / message / logos – Improve recognition
- Improve coordination of efforts
- Identify additional outlets

Foreign Language Populations

The Library recognizes the diversity within the community. The Library regularly monitors school report cards for demographic shifts. The Library successfully provides literacy services to adults seeking to learn or improve upon their English. The Library shall pursue opportunities to serve those for whom English is not their primary language.

- The Library shall consider multilingual skills as an asset during recruitment of staff.
- The Library shall provide basic service information (flyers, brochures) in Spanish.
- The Library shall continue to promote literacy services.
- The Library shall identify outlets to promote its' services.

Provide services to Local Businesses

The Library shall seek opportunities to partner with local businesses. The Library provides access to a variety of databases, including ReferenceUSA and Frost and Sullivan Industry Reports. It is not believed that local businesses take advantage of these resources. Staff do not use them frequently enough to be considered experts in their use.

The Library currently permits the use of the meeting room by for-profit entities, but does not actively recruit local businesses to present informational programs. Providing local businesses an opportunity to explain their services is of benefit to both the community and the business interests within the borough. The Library should position itself as a conduit without endorsing businesses.

- Host a local business fair.
- Designate staff as experts in the use of available databases.

Identify & Promote Unique Services

The user survey revealed that few active patrons are aware of existing unique services. Among these are the free fax service, notary service, public scanner, delivery to the homebound, inter-library loan outside of BCCLS, and reader's advisory. In addition to promoting existing services, the Library shall seek to provide other non-traditional services useful to the community to increase its overall value.

IV. Volunteers

Literacy Volunteers

The adult literacy program has been in place for over 15 years. This is a very popular program that benefits the community. Tutors find the work rewarding and students appreciate the opportunity to improve their English skills.

Coordinator of Volunteer Activities

The Library created a volunteer form on its website and provided a suggested list of activities. This resulted in a constant flow of applicants and volunteer hours. Students and adults have managed the used books, straightened the books on shelves, cleaned shelves, digitized local history materials, and assisted with crafts. Given the necessary time to supervise and motivate volunteers, it is desirable to recruit a volunteer to manage applicants and coordinate their hours and activities. A regular schedule of service must be established.

V. Staff and Trustee Development

Staff - Technology Skills

We are no longer in an era bridging the old and the new. We are in an environment that is changing rapidly because of technology change. The library catalog has been online since 1996. The high school students have been using laptops since 2006. E-readers and e-books are eclipsing sales of traditional print books on Amazon. We can watch full-length movies streaming over the internet on our hand-held devices. Staff are not expected to know everything, but they shall endeavor to keep abreast of changes and know how to utilize technology in the workplace.

- Staff shall be encouraged to attend workshops, webinars, and classes
- The Library shall make available to staff the tools to keep pace. The Library already demonstrated this by purchasing several early generation e-readers.
- More emphasis shall be given to what staff has learned and mastered in their performance reviews and personal improvement goals.
- The director shall define a list of core competencies.

Staff - Interpersonal Skills

The Library prides itself on customer service. It is staff ability to help the public accomplish their projects and fulfill their informational and recreational needs that sets the library apart. Good, helpful, and friendly service will make fundraising, marketing of

services, and growth in the user base possible. The director shall continue to foster excellence in customer service.

- The Library will review existing policies for customer friendliness.
- The Library Board shall establish a Customer Service Policy.
- The Staff shall be provided opportunities to discuss the library environment and continue to refine existing behaviors.

Trustees – Advocate

The Trustees shall advocate for the library. To achieve this it is imperative that trustees avail themselves of information about the library and how changes in the community and world affect it. Trustees shall:

- Attend workshops / classes
- Monitor developments in public library service
- Speak with friends, neighbors and community groups about the library to both inform and solicit opinion
- Trustees shall develop a “Library at a Glance” brochure as a promotional aid.

VI. Collection Development

The library collection is comprised of books, magazines, music CDs, DVDs, videogames, audio books, databases, downloadable content and streaming content. The Library strives to provide a well rounded general collection in a wide variety of formats for the enjoyment and benefit of all Hillsdale residents. The following are suggested for special consideration to augment our material collection.

eBooks / media

There is an increased interest in ebooks. In 2010, many patrons purchased or received as gifts electronic e-readers. The Library shall endeavor to meet the growing demand for ebooks in an efficient and cost-effective manner. The Board and staff shall monitor the changes in this technology and market.

- The Library shall also monitor and meet demand for other electronic and digital media such as streaming services.
- The Library shall establish a timeframe and methodology to transition from paper materials to digital formats.
- The Library shall prioritize the retention of existing collections.
- The Library shall educate the public about E-readers/E-Books and the possibility of loaning equipment.

Simplify User Experience (The Dewey Problem)

The 2006 Plan called for the evaluation of the non-fiction collection in terms of arrangement. Some of the collections had become difficult to find because of changes in classification numbers. The books on learning disabilities could be found in several different Dewey number locations. These have been pulled together under one unified number. There remain other problematic subjects to tackle.

In 2011, the Old Tappan Library launched a program to replace Dewey numbers with a classification system akin to that found in bookstores. This idea has been implemented by many small public libraries in prominent systems. The Hillsdale collection is of a small size and could be rearranged in this fashion. Another alternative would be to adopt a simplified Dewey approach.

- Monitor progress of Old Tappan
- Identify problem areas
- Utilize volunteers to re-label items
- The Director shall report on the feasibility of such a project

VII. Capital Needs

Computer Replacement Schedule

The library replaced all of the public access computers during 2010. These replaced the PCs purchased in 2005. As soon as a few new ones appeared, the public wanted to use

those, rather than the “dated looking” ones. It is recommended that the library begin setting aside money for another mass upgrade in 2015.

Meeting Room Upgrades

The Library could improve its perceived value by upgrading the projection and sound system. The projector’s bulb is nearing the end of its useful life. The replacement cost of the bulb is \$349.00 or 33-50% of an HD model (\$800 to \$1,200). We regularly hear complaints about the quality of the sound quality of the surround system. A system with greater control over the acoustic range is desirable.

The Library should acquire a podium for speakers. We have made due with a variety of table tops, but a proper podium for notes or a laptop is desirable.

Landscaping

The Library needs to improve maintenance of the grounds.

- Budget for professionals or recruit volunteers
- Prune trees of dead branches and maintain shape of healthy trees
- Weed beds on regular basis and trim shrubs

HVAC Controls

The controls for the HVAC system remain a challenge for staff especially during transitional seasons. The various units suffer from the fact that they are not all tied together with one central controller. Without constant attention and tweaking by staff, the environment is frequently either too hot or too cold.

Parking Lot Maintenance

The parking lot needs to be striped. The gravel portion of the lot shall be renewed periodically after heavy winter plowings. There is a tree that produces large nuts in husks that present a tripping hazard every fall. The dumpster area is made unsightly due to stray garbage and creeping dumpsters. The dumpsters could be contained behind fencing.

VIII. Goals and Objectives Removed from 2006 Plan:

The library does not have the physical space, ample funding, or staff expertise to develop a foreign language collection. According to the school report cards, the percentage of families for which English is not the primary language spoken at home is very small when compared to other Bergen County municipalities.

The library initiated the development of the documentary, foreign and subject specific video collection with assistance from the Friends of the Library.

A foundation for the library was discussed. A renewed and robust Friends of the Library would be a simpler vehicle to raise additional funds for the library.

A delivery service to the homebound was established. Only a handful of residents take advantage of the service in spite of repeated publicity attempts. There were more volunteers to deliver materials than residents requesting the service.

A new digital photocopier was leased. It is providing excellent service with little down-time. The current lease expires in April 2012. Options will be presented to the Board.

A landscape and sprinkler plan was completed in 2007. A routine maintenance schedule must be established. See note on volunteer opportunities.

IX. Appendix – 2011 User Survey

One difficulty in asking open-ended questions is that you receive open-ended answers. Below is a list of the topics most frequently mentioned in the survey.

- Increase programming for children, especially for dual-income parents that cannot come during the workday. (crafts, parent/child reading group, programs for the tweens, game clubs, drop-in storytimes)
- Increase programs for adults of all ages. (lectures, crafts, variety in topics)
- A great many commented on the continued need for new materials (blu-ray, bestsellers, wider variety of music, audio books) and a need to reduce wait times.
- Less often mentioned but obviously a need - more instruction time for technology, using the catalog and services. People refer to classes, but what they need is friendly help.
- More “comfy” chairs and places to sit and do work was prominent
- There were many comments that indicated ignorance of existing services, so further promotion of what we already do is called for

There were a number of items that would be great if only we had unlimited funding, more floor space, and permission from the Federal government. The parking lot was mentioned frequently, but at least we can re-stripe it for better visibility. The public would love a 24 hour library, but they might settle for additional weekend hours. This may not be feasible given the long-term funding forecast. It may be possible to extend Sunday by an hour or two if we reduce hours somewhere else. Personnel are the largest expense and we have to pay our people so they can live too. If anyone can find a feasible way to do the drive-by book drop, talk to me.