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WICHITA PUBLIC LIBRARY

Strategic Agenda

Wichita Public Library | April 2024

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Acknowledgments

The Public Policy and Management Center (PPMC) would like to thank the Wichita Public Library leadership team and the strategic agenda committee who assisted with input into this report.

Disclaimer

The PPMC at Wichita State University conducted this study. The PPMC is an independent research body unaffiliated with the Wichita Public Library. This report was prepared by the research team, and data was collected from external sources. The findings represent the views, opinions, and conclusions of the research team alone. The report does not express the official or unofficial policy of Wichita State University.

The Next Edition

For almost 200 years, public libraries have been an integral part of local communities in the United States. These institutions have championed literacy, created access to knowledge, and been a welcoming space for residents. The world looks vastly different than when the Peterborough (N.H.) Town Library was founded in 1833 as the first institution funded by a municipality with the explicit purpose of establishing a free library open to all in the community.

However, the fundamental need for literacy, access to resources, and safe public spaces remains constant. Fulfilling these needs empowers residents to connect, discover, learn, and thrive. The reality of limited resources, competing values, and relevance to residents are challenges for all public institutions. Defining the next edition of the Wichita Public Library to meet these modern challenges and empower residents is the motivation of this strategic agenda. Whether it is a young family needing resources for early literacy, an older adult needing help with online forms, or any resident needing a place to belong and connect, the Wichita Public Library strives to meet those needs for the community.

Background

In the summer of 2023, the Wichita Public Library (Library) embarked on a transformative journey to craft a strategic agenda that not only aligns with the diverse needs of the community but also harnesses the organization's distinct resources to generate meaningfully empowered residents. Building upon the foundations laid by the 2019-2023 Master Plan, "Focused on Community," the Library has successfully modernized its facilities and is poised to deepen service connections to address pivotal challenges facing Wichita. The strategic agenda for the Library sets forth the path to achieve that vision.

Through extensive focus groups, interviews, and an immersive design-thinking workshop, valuable insights were gathered. These insights serve as the bedrock for both strategic drivers and the creation of a dynamic agenda that translates vision into reality, fulfilling the organization's mission. The intent is to enhance Library service delivery to effectively equip individuals and the broader community. Adopting a customer-centric approach that encompasses both Library users and non-users is key to the work.

The strategic agenda bridges the work previously completed by the Library and provides a blueprint to prioritize the use of resources (time, financial, and human) in the future. In addition, the strategic agenda identifies key initiatives and performance indicators to implement the agenda.

Foundation of the Wichita Public Library

The Library's mission, vision statement, and values were created before the strategic agenda planning. These along with identified strategic assets serve as the foundation for the strategic agenda.

Mission Statement:

Connect. Discover. Learn. Thrive.

Vision Statement:

Inclusive. Responsive. Collaborative.
Your Library makes your community limitless.

Values:

Trust and Service are City of Wichita values that influence our interactions and decisions. We recognize that Wichita Public Library, as a social institution, has a duty to advance equity through library services to ensure all residents experience a sense of belonging. To support this work, we are guided by the following values:

- ***Community:*** *We embrace our role as a community anchor. Our services evolve to meet the needs of our residents.*
- ***Diversity:*** *We respect, reflect and value differences. Our services are inclusive and actively affirm the varied needs and interests of everyone.*
- ***Opportunity:*** *We support curiosity, exploration, and learning for all individuals. We actively seek opportunities for our staff and community to learn, grow and thrive.*

Strategic Assets:

During the strategic agenda process of the focus groups, interviews, design-thinking retreat, and leadership sessions, there were several unique Wichita Public Library assets identified to empower residents in the Wichita community:

1. ***Geographic reach*** (seven fixed facilities, virtual access, and agile mobile services)
2. ***Materials and resources*** (knowledge and wonder through physical, electronic, and human resources)
3. ***Service approach to empower residents*** (Connecting people to resources is in the DNA of all libraries)
4. ***Existing partnerships*** (programming, service extension, community connections through mutually beneficial partnerships)
5. ***Staff excellence*** (building and virtual operations, resource navigators, programmers, outreach, support, researchers, problem-solvers, and public servants)
6. ***Trusted public service*** (the Library is consistently ranked by residents as a trusted source)
7. ***Financial resources*** (the Library has both government support and philanthropical support)

These clear assets are the foundation for the Library to further empower residents and address key issues within the community.

Challenges and Opportunities

Several focus groups and interviews were conducted to understand the perception of the Library, provide feedback on the preferred role and services of the Library, and identify how the Library can best serve to address critical community issues. Many suggestions from the focus groups and interviews aligned with the current priorities and services of the Library. From the feedback, key challenges were identified.

Key Challenges from Focus Groups/Interviews

Through listening to the stakeholders and discussions with the leadership team, the following three key challenges were defined:

1. **Literacies:** How can the Library be engaged and impactful with literacies to improve the collective success and embolden Wichitans to connect, discover, learn, and thrive?
2. **Awareness:** How can the Library raise awareness of services and resources so the Library can play a greater role in the future as a welcoming and low-barrier place to access resources for residents and connect partners in the community?
3. **Partnerships:** How can the Library amplify and create strategic partnerships to have an impact on key community issues, challenges, and opportunities?

(See Attachment A, Stakeholder Themes Report)

According to the American Library Association, the following are key terms for the "Literacy for All" effort (See Attachment A for more information):

Definitions

A. *Literacy is the ability to use printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential.*
B. *Basic literacy skills include reading, writing, listening, and speaking.*
C. *Digital literacy is the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate.*
D. *Information literacy is the ability to recognize the extent and nature of an information need, and then to locate, evaluate, and effectively use the needed information.*
E. *Financial literacy is the ability to use knowledge and skills to effectively manage one's financial resources.*
F. *Health literacy is the ability to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions.*

Design Thinking Opportunities

The information from the interviews and focus groups was used to inform a Design Thinking Workshop. The Workshop focused on the customer perspective. Each team focused on a different potential Library user or non-user to identify key pain points that the Library could potentially address. The Workshop resulted in three key themes for the Library. *(See Attachment B: Design Thinking Workshop Report)*

Customer-Centered Service Approach

Three key themes were apparent:

1. **Expand targeted services**
   The Library has an opportunity to expand its reach through targeted services. By understanding the needs of specific personas in the Design Thinking Workshop, participants identified the need for service expansions to provide opportunities for both users and non-users. For many of the segments identified, the depth of the services can be developed over time.
2. **Elevate community outreach**
   Increased engagement starts outside of the Library. There was significant ideation around targeted community outreach to better serve underserved and under-represented communities and groups. The concept is — the more the Library engages with existing groups and organizations, the more people will potentially engage with the Library.
3. **Build key partnerships**
   Building partner relationships creates opportunities for future programs and engagement. Collaborating with partner organizations reduces the duplication of programs, helps cross-promote services, and provides depth of services to both the Library and the partner. Furthermore, partnerships expand the Library's impact and community network.

Strategic Drivers

Using the engagement effort, strategic drivers were defined for the Library. Strategic drivers are the ultimate lens the Library looks through to determine priorities, goals, and strategies. The strategic drivers are clearly and specifically the work of the Wichita Public Library, not another organization. The strategic drivers provide additional guardrails on the role of the Library. Underserved or under-resourced populations, especially non-users, are the primary audiences.

Strategic Driver #1: Advance literacies for life to empower residents.

Key Performance Indicator: Percent of programming aligned with strategic driver.

	Priorities	Actions
A.	Improve early childhood literacy.	Focus on enhancing pre-reading skills and supporting proficiency in reading from pre-school through third grade.
B.	Address low literacy for adults.	Concentrate efforts on addressing and improving adult low-reading abilities.
C.	Increase digital literacy.	Prioritize the advancement of digital literacy skills to equip individuals with essential competencies for the digital age.
D.	Increase literacies in other areas of empowerment.	Connect residents to a spectrum of literacy skills beyond reading, including civic, cultural, financial, health, information, media, and emotional literacies.
E.	Support literary creators.	Champion and support those contributing to the written word, including authors, to enrich the literary landscape.

Note: Ensure branch libraries address literacy needs unique to their target markets.

Implementation Steps

1. Define parameters for literacy programming and services for the strategic driver.
2. Evaluate how current resources align with this strategic driver.
3. Redirect library programming, services, and staffing to address literacy needs with the following breakdown:
    a. **Traditional literacy skills (pre-k/3rd grade reading, low literacy adults)**
        - Free, plentiful, and accessible
        - Direct library staff service and free partner service
        - 50% of services and programming connect to this literacy skill
        - The target audience is non-users and low access emphasis
    b. **Digital literacy skills**
        - Free, plentiful, and accessible
        - Direct library staff service and free partner service
        - 25% of services and programming connect to this literacy skill
        - The target audience is non-users and low access emphasis
    c. **Public literacy skills (civic, cultural, information, media)**
        - Combination of library and partner-provided service
        - Layer in library strategic drivers — traditional/digital literacy and supporting literacy creators
        - 15% of services and programming connect to this literacy skill
    d. **Personal literacy skills (financial, health, emotional)**
        - Partner services (library provides space and limited support but relies on partners to provide services)
        - Layer in library strategic drivers — traditional/digital literacy
        - 10% of services programming connect to this literacy skill

Strategic Driver #2: Elevate awareness of library resources to empower residents.

Key Performance Indicator: Increased website traffic, social media metrics, and new users

	Priorities	Actions
A.	Invest in diverse marketing and engagement strategies.	Allocate resources to enhance communication channels and engagement strategies with target populations to reach beyond the facilities.
B.	Expand technology applications to reach diverse populations.	Expand technology applications and delivery methods to keep pace with evolving needs and social media platforms.
C.	Leverage expertise of library staff.	Harness the expertise of Library staff as a primary asset for elevating awareness of library resources.
D.	Reduce barriers for library services access.	Ensure libraries serve as accessible, safe, and welcoming place for the community.
E.	Develop multiple options for customers to access information.	Create a system to allow for a variety of service options for customers to access information ranging from self-service to individual support.

Implementation Steps

1. Elevate the communication and community information plan.
2. Identify opportunities to redirect administrative operations or services to support more resources in communication and marketing.
3. Implement a cultural shift so each Library staff member is a marketing and engagement representative.
4. Provide training and professional development for employees to be empowered as marketing and engagement representatives.
5. Align expectations and performance reviews.

Strategic Driver #3: Build partnerships to expand impact.

Key Performance Indicator: Increase the number of strategic partnerships.

	Priorities	Actions
A.	Develop strategic partnerships.	Establish partnership priorities that align with literacies priorities, community issues, and specific needs at the branch level.
B.	Amplify impact of advocates.	Galvanize the impact of advocates, including the board of directors, support groups, and volunteer programs, to strengthen community partnerships and outreach efforts.
C.	Dedicate staff to building community partnerships.	Utilize Library staff as a primary asset in building and nurturing community partnerships, fostering collaboration through active external engagement outside of the Library facilities.
D.	Define partnership expectations.	Define the dynamics of partnerships, specifying whether partners provide direct services or if staff shares resources to connect, and establish clear priorities for the collaborative work.

Implementation Steps

1. Develop a staffing structure that allows professional librarians to have fewer administrative roles and more community engagement and partnership-building roles. Determine other opportunities with existing staff.
2. Create an empowerment framework for staff to address operation issues more easily
3. Provide training and professional development on the empowerment framework and expectations.
4. Develop information tools for library advocates and strategic partners to easily promote library services.

Conclusion

The Wichita Public Library is a trusted and valued public institution in our community. The Library has a unique opportunity to leverage its role in the community to empower residents through resources and community connections to Connect, Discover, Learn, and Thrive. By redirecting resources to strategic drivers, the impact of the Wichita Public Library will continue to amplify throughout the community.

Addendum

Organizational Future Service Assessment and Strategic Design Themes Report

Wichita Public Library | November 2023

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The Public Policy and Management Center (PPMC) would like to thank the Wichita Public Library who assisted with input into this report, especially the Library Leadership Team.

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Background

In response to the request from the Wichita Public Library, the Public Policy and Management Center (PPMC) at Wichita State University proposed to assist the Wichita Public Library (Library) with a strategic agenda design project. As part of the work, stakeholder focus groups and interviews were conducted. This report provides a summary of the focus groups and interviews with stakeholders.

External Stakeholder Interviews

The PPMC conducted key stakeholder interviews with a variety of community leaders to assess the gap in community information, place-based community services, and community development. The interview process intends to identify the gaps in community needs AND potential opportunities for the Library to provide services to fulfill those gaps.

Interviews or focus groups were conducted with the following:

- HumanKind Ministries
- Wichita Independent Secular Educators (WISE)
- Library Governance Boards
- Central Plains Area Agency on Aging
- Wichita Journalism Collaborative
- Mayor Brandon Whipple and City Council Members Mike Hoheisel, Brandon Johnson, Becky Tuttle, Bryan Frye, and Maggie Ballard
- Advisory Board: Comprised of representation from the City of Wichita, LGBTQ+ Chamber, Kansas Leadership Center, Library Board, W/ Young Professionals of Wichita, Wichita Unified School District 259, Wichita Public Library Leadership Team, Urban League Of Kansas, Kansas Health Foundation, United Way of the Plains, WSU Tech, Child Start, Greater Wichita YMCA
- Library Staff
- Workforce Alliance of South-Central Kansas

Common Themes

The following is a summary of the feedback per topic:

Areas of Excellence

What are areas of excellence for the Library?

1. Community Driven: The Library appears to "take care" of its customers and serves its community genuinely and intentionally. Specific examples mentioned the removal of late fees, access to technology, low cost/no cost to general entry (free space),
2. and providing laptops and hotspots.
3. Children Programming: Quality events for kids (Storytime, Summer Reading, 1000 books).
4. Collaboration: Eagerness to partner in a variety of areas.
5. Communications: Good marketing and communication strategy.
6. Leadership: Excellent leadership and staff. Willingness to think outside the box.

How can these strengths serve the community in other ways or in efforts that may not be considered traditional library services?

1. **Expand partnerships:** Partner with additional services, to reach more people to connect with services.
    - Provide training workshops to staff.
    - Leverage the "third space" concept with shared space with other resources, such as Evergreen model.
    - Check out materials online and pick up at community centers (instead of just libraries) and expand the hours of community centers to enhance their mission as resource centers.

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2. **Invest in community communication:** Utilize technology more to reach more people, such as text to library clients about events, resources, etc. Leverage partnership and their circles of influence to share information about the Library.
3. **English as a second language:** Address language barriers (English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Braille) that limit access for people.
4. **Knowledge exchange:** Bring people together for forums/hear experts about big community issues so people can think of community in better terms than "government." Expand role as a community gathering place.

Gaps in Public Service

Community Issues

What are critical community issues impacting Wichita?

1. **Literacy:** Decline in literacy and digital literacy; vetting valid sources and proper research
2. **Public Service:** Lack of interest in public service
3. **Accessing Services:** Little knowledge of how to obtain public resources
4. **Transportation:** Lack of transportation
5. **Behavioral Health:** Significant mental health and addiction issues, especially prevalent in youth and young adults, but also older adults
6. **Political Divide:** Tribalization/political polarization and erosion of civil discourse between differing viewpoints

How could the Library assist in addressing these gaps?

1. **Programs and Services:**
   a) Application Assistance:
      - Medicaid
      - KEEPS
      - LEAP forms
      - Financial/Food Assistance Form Support

   b) Information and Resource Hub/Mobile Hub:
      - 411-like information
      - Accessible resource hub
      - Alternative Bus Ticket/Voucher Distributor
      - Help with IDs and birth certificates
      - DMV and DCF services on the go
      - Social workers and DCF employees in the libraries.

2. **Community Engagement:**
    a) Community Navigators: In the role of pseudo-community centers, provide space for social services to utilize facilities.
    b) Be known as a place for the housing vulnerable to have a safe place to be and potentially connect with services. Be cool stations for the unhoused in the summer heat and warm places in the winter. Provide access for barrier free communication means (wifi, telephone calls)
    c) Inclusivity and Safe Space: Active efforts for inclusivity and safe space for all Wichitans. Align library hours to meet community needs.
    d) Be a thought leader. Be at the table.
3. **Civic Discussions and Involvement**
    a) Host discussions civic topic on relevant community issues such as performing arts & convention center, affordable housing, homelessness, budget/economic challenges, crime prevention/helping police, etc.
    b) Launch Civic Engagement 101 (ongoing class)
    c) Be "Switzerland" non-biased space to engage community
    d) Forums and civil discourse on state or national issues
    e) Serve as an outlet to engage individuals into civic life
4. **Access and Technology**
    a) Provide additional services to meet access needs
    b) Provide resources to address digital divide

Additional Insights for the Library

How can the Library have greater reach into the community to serve people they don't currently serve?

1. **Community Outreach:**
    a) **Build Relations**: Engage community more through meetings, existing organizations, community groups, and key partners and influencers.
    b) **Marketing and Technology Strategies**: Enhance marketing and communication strategies; use geofencing to reach non-traditional library users.
    c) **Street Appeal**: Enhance the street appeal of branches: be inviting, colorful, murals, and art
    d) **Creative intergenerational programming**: Provide programming to connect generations, such as: rent-a-grandparent reading program or other intergenerational connections opportunities to collaborate

2. **Accessible Services:**
    a) **Mobile services:** Align branch services with the needs of neighborhoods, provide drive-thru service conveniences, engage with non-users.
    b) **Integrate with schools:** Address multigenerational needs.
    c) **Technology access:** Be a safe space for aging people, and others, to learn how to use changing technology

What is your vision/ultimate hope for the library?

1. Evolve into a modern operation with the goal of community education (which is way more than just getting books).
2. Enhance the mission of archiving local history (the Wichita collection).
3. Be a resource center for community/social service needs.
4. All branches embrace the Advanced Learning Library's role of providing reading materials, maker spaces, programming, speakers, workshops, etc.'
5. Potentially host city offices.
6. Become a mixed-use development with housing, retail, restaurants, etc.

What obstacles exist?

1. Lack of funding from the public sector, long-term investments
2. Large shift in direction for the Library, culture change
3. Communication from the Library to the public is difficult
4. Limited hours open to the public

Have you seen any other community practices in other cities that Wichita should use?

1. Library buildings in some communities inspire and "wow" people with their curb appeal. The visual presence of most of our buildings is not compelling. Need to increase public art in and around libraries.
2. No, we're at the forefront or at least on par with others. Proud of Wichita's Big Read program and partnering with Watermark for author signing events and for promoting local authors.
3. Rock Hill, SC – Library is in a mixed-use development.