

# EAST BRUNSWICK PUBLIC LIBRARY

## STRATEGIC PLAN

### 2012-2015

#### **INTRODUCTION**

East Brunswick Public Library embarked on a strategic planning process in 2011 to develop strategies that will keep the library responsive to customer needs during a rapidly changing environment for public libraries. The strategic plan will guide library services for the next 3-5 years, and will be reevaluated annually to address emerging opportunities and community needs.

#### **PROCESS:**

The Board and Director were committed to a process that would be inclusive, future oriented and draw on the wisdom of EBPL's constituency as well as their own experience to establish library priorities. In order to gather input from our residents, the Board and staff agreed to conduct two community conversations, execute an online survey, hold a full day board/senior staff retreat and invite all library staff to contribute their ideas and suggestions through planned departmental meetings.

#### **Community conversations:**

Over 60 members of the East Brunswick community, selected for their diverse representation of multiple library constituencies, gathered for two three-hour sessions entitled "**The Role of the Library in the Emerging Landscape: We're In this Together.**" The first session was designed to create a shared understanding of what residents value and appreciate about East Brunswick. In addition to the library, participants placed schools, the feeling of community among a very diverse population, safety and excellent municipal services at the top of the list.

The group then identified the trends that were affecting the community. Primary among these was the competition for resources and reduced municipal services resulting from a very challenging economy. However, many in the room felt a sense of hope, based on the resources and ingenuity present in the community. This feeling was summarized as, "East Brunswick has maintained a level of excellence and we have a continued commitment to this. We are stretched, but want to maintain expectations. We've got what it takes to figure it out and we are ready to make things work.

At the second session the group, comprised primarily of library users, identified what they value about the library, and their priorities for future library services. The group as a whole was very satisfied with library services, and the following in particular:

- A good place to go
- Knowledgeable, welcoming staff
- A culture of collaboration and service
- Information and business resources

- Books (fiction) and entertainment
- Great for children and students
- Programs

After much discussion of priorities for library services, the group ranked library services. The top four service priorities are reflected in the top four goals described in the strategic plan. The following comments reflect additional conclusions from the session:

- *We like the library as it is. Keep it that way.*
- *We are a pro-library community. Whatever the library decides it will be supported by the people of East Brunswick.*
- *The library is one of the more complicated services in contrast to other municipal services because it serves so many different people and needs. Our community needs to support the final product through a combination of tax dollars, fees and contributions. The challenge is to have knowledge, understanding and confidence that leads to the fair distribution of tax dollars. The more confident we feel, the more likely people will contribute. Confidence comes, in part, from knowing the budget, including the amount contributed by the Friends of the Library. We need to develop appropriate, reasonable, realistic, responsible expectations. As tax dollars decline the library will have to respond with some combination of raised prices and reduced costs.*

**Board retreat:**

EBPL's Board of Trustees met with the library's managers to create a strategic framework for The Library's future. The group debriefed what had been learned from input from the community and discussed significant changes in community demographics, library usage and the field of library services.

Based on these discussions, library leaders defined the keys to success for EBPL going forward, including core roles, guiding principles and other factors that will shape library decision making going forward. Their conclusions form the framework for the strategic plan.

**Full staff input:**

Managers for each library department: Adult and Technical Services, Information Technology and EBT, Information Services, Circulation Services, Youth Services, Administrative Services, Maintenance Services conducted departmental meetings and invited all staff to brainstorm ideas for what services they thought the library should offer in the next three years. Staff was encouraged to send their ideas to their department managers to be put in a document that was then reviewed and prioritized by the Administrative staff. Every idea was considered. Based on the criteria of the Strategic plan, staff ideas that were accepted were added to the goals and objectives of the draft plan.

## **CONTEXT**

### ➤ **History of Excellence**

The East Brunswick community has come to expect a very high standard of excellence from their library, and library leaders are committed to upholding this standard. Keys to excellence, based on input from the community and the assessment of professional staff, include:

- **Staff Expertise and Customer Service.** As seen from community members' description of library staff (below), a combination of staff skills and attitudes make the library such an important community resource. Staff are described as:
  - Patient, wonderful, resourceful
  - Reliable – they can answer any question
  - Knowledgeable, kind, considerate

In terms of expertise, managers believe that the library's cadre of "expert generalists" – professional staff who can work in all areas, but with a depth of knowledge about a specific area (e.g. youth and children, adult fiction, reference) – has been key to excellent services.

The library has a tradition of being customer-driven. Staff pay close attention to patron needs, and have the capacity and commitment to innovate in response. Staff is also intentional about making all members of the community feel welcome. This is achieved in part, by hiring a diverse staff, reflecting the demographics of the community-

- **Resources.** The library has a history of keeping up with changing formats for materials. The strategy to date has been to offer materials in multiple formats, eliminating certain formats as they are replaced with more contemporary ones. In keeping with a focus on customer service, collections are driven in part by customer requests for particular materials.

Technology has become an increasingly important aspect of library services and information. The library has embraced emerging technologies, creating opportunities for patrons to learn and access them.

- **Programs that Bring the Community Together.** A third component of excellence is the way that the library plays the role of community gathering space. The library is *de facto* the one place in the community where all members come together naturally. In addition, the library offers high quality programming for children and adults that provides a framework for interaction among community members from different backgrounds. The design of the space encourages people to gather in smaller groupings. Partnerships with community groups bring cultural programming to the library.

### ➤ **Changing Library Environment**

According to the ALA policy brief entitled "**Confronting the Future: Strategic Visions for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Public Library**" by Roger E. Levien, "the changes

confronting public libraries over the next 30 years will be profound..” According to the report, specific changes facing public libraries include:

- **Advances in Digital Media and Technologies:** Virtually all newly published media and a substantial portion of previously published media will be available in digital format in the coming decades.
- **Heightened Competition:** Services available via the network will take on many of the functions performed by libraries.
- **Demographic Transformation:** US population will rise to 438 million by 2050, 80% of this increase being due to immigration; by 2050, just over 1 in 5 persons will be over 65 years old.
- **Fiscal constraints:** government at every level will need to cut back services as a result of declining revenues

➤ **Challenges to Maintaining Excellence**

Changes in the library environment pose a number of challenges for EBPL’s history of excellence, specifically due to:

- **Budget Reductions.**
  - Staff: Budget reductions have resulted in significant staff reductions. Further reductions in staff are likely to impact the extent to which the library can provide the level of service that the public has come to expect, especially with regard to specific areas of expertise.
  - Materials and Technology. Fewer dollars for materials and technology, particularly at a time of increasing demand for expensive electronic resources, makes it difficult to achieve the optimal balance of materials in multiple formats in support of the community’s preferences.
  - Trying to Maintain Current Hours. Keeping the library open is a priority for community and the library. Budget constraints may require further reductions in hours at a time when the community is asking the library to restore hours that have already be cut.
  - Reduced Ability to Plan for the Future. Library reserves earmarked for new technology and responses to emerging trends no longer exist. Fewer municipal dollars means less ability to adapt to change and more urgency to raise private dollars.
- **Perceptions that libraries are no longer essential.** EBPL has strong support from East Brunswick residents. However, there is a growing sentiment in the country that libraries may no longer be an essential information resource now that most people have access to the Internet. As the ALA policy brief notes, “a potential library patron with a computer and an Internet connection, as well as an iPad, Kindle, or other e-reader can already gain access to more books, videos and music than any public library can provide.” To the extent that these perceptions influence budgetary decisions they may threaten future excellence.
- **Matching staff skills to emerging needs.** All library staff must develop skills that go beyond those taught in library school. These include:

- Emerging technologies and new media. Library staff must continue to embrace and respond to new technology and incorporate it into our daily job tasks.
- Research. Librarians have identified customized research as an essential service for the library of the future. Staff must possess the expertise needed to provide this service.
- Outreach. Library services of the future will require staff to be even more proactive in reaching out to members of the community to determine how to serve them.
- Educating. The role of the library professional is shifting from provider of information to that of guidance and instructive reference so that people can become efficient (self-sufficient) consumers of information.

➤ **Strategic Imperatives**

In order to maintain excellent service, stay relevant, and demonstrate the library's continued value to the community, the following strategic priorities infuse the strategic plan.

- **Maximize revenue streams, which includes:**
  - Promote established revenue streams
  - Seek out new opportunities to provide new services for a fee.
  - Support and educate library advocates in their role as fundraisers.
  
- **Broaden partnerships with the community that complement and supplement library expertise and resources.** For example:
  - Partner with teams of expert advisors from the community to develop new services, building on the success of the Business Leadership Team model.
  - Pair teen experts with those who need help with technology
  
- **Market library expertise and services to the public.**

Ensure that the community, elected officials and business partners are aware of the full range of library services and resources available to them, and ways that the library adds value to the East Brunswick community via:

  - Expand outreach to the community, including partners, supporters and newly identified groups, using dedicated staff and EBTV.
  - Build awareness of the customized services that the library provides.
  - Proactively demonstrate library expertise and customer service for customers in the library and those accessing the library's resources remotely.
  
- **Maximize the effectiveness of available staff, which includes:**
  - Capitalize on the availability of professional expertise on staff.
  - Formalize staff development and supervision practices that expand the capabilities of all staff.
  - Streamline processes to more effectively utilize staff.
  - Explore the use of volunteers and interns to offer enhanced services.

These strategic imperatives are incorporated into the library's goals throughout the strategic plan.

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**STRATEGIC PLAN**  
**EAST BRUNSWICK PUBLIC LIBRARY**  
**2012 - 2015**

**I. Mission**

As the information center of the community, the East Brunswick Public Library strives to deliver the highest level of timely service to library users of all ages as it promotes literacy, lifelong learning, personal enrichment, and the principles of intellectual freedom.

**II. Guiding Principles**

- **Access.** As the most democratic of institutions, libraries offer people of all backgrounds and ages open access to the information and materials they need to enhance their lives and the life of their community. Libraries are at the core of a literate society, in which all members of a community have the freedom and opportunity to read and become informed. EBPL is committed to helping all members of the community overcome barriers to access, whether due to economics, language, age or other factors.
- **Excellence** – EBPL is committed to its reputation for excellence. Board and staff would rather do less, and do it very well, than do more at a lower level of quality.
- **Innovative and Proactive** – EBPL will continue to stay up-to-date with trends in library services, anticipating and responding to changing customer interests and needs.
- **Customer Service** – Library staff will continue to deliver excellent, welcoming, culturally-sensitive service. Services will be personalized to save customers time and better respond to their needs. Staff will meet the customer where they are, going to them (both physically and virtually) and in the library building.
- **Non-judgmental and Unbiased.** EBPL offers a welcoming environment for all.

**III. Program Goals and Initiatives**

The following service areas were identified as priorities by the Board of Trustees and senior managers based on input from the community:

**A. Support for Learning and Development (Children and Teens)**

Support early literacy and lifelong learning for children and teens by providing resources, activities, expertise and meeting places for young people from infancy through high school, both physically and virtually.

1. Offer educational opportunities for youth of all ages that respond to their informational requests, natural curiosity, and articulated needs.

2. Create opportunities for teens to fulfill community service requirements, develop life skills and participate in cross-generational activities.
3. Identify and respond to unmet needs of children in partnership with a new Youth Leadership Team.
4. Optimize the use of space in support of teen learning.

## **B. Information**

Help people of all ages find the information they need, regardless of the medium.

1. Explore new methods of providing customized research in every subject area.
  - a. Build on the success of the Business Leadership Team model to create and promote customized information packages including the following areas:
    - Business – forge relationships with businesses and identify research opportunities.
    - Health – expand the scope of the program, with input from the new health leadership team.
  - b. Maximize the availability of trained reference staff to conduct customized research.
2. Continue to offer and promote adult programming that offers content, and opportunities to create content, that are not available elsewhere in the community, in partnership with local businesses, artists and community groups.
3. Maintain access to commercially produced databases.

## **C. Services for Recreational Readers**

Connect readers to reading materials in a variety of formats using expert knowledge and personal interaction.

1. Determine and regularly refine the appropriate balance of digital and written materials
  - a. Expand the library's digital collections as appropriate based on ongoing analysis.
    - Regularly monitor and evaluate factors that affect collection development, including community preferences, cost considerations, emerging technology and the ever-changing landscape of digital collections.
    - Assist customers to use both hardware and software to access electronic reading materials.
    - Secure new revenue streams to provide seed money for new collections.
  - b. Maintain a collection of books in paper format.

2. Link people to reading materials they enjoy by expanding the use of social networking tools.

**D. Multi-Generational, Multi-Cultural Gathering Place.** Ensure that the library remains a center of the East Brunswick community, providing a gathering place for people of all ages, religions, ethnicities, socioeconomic and educational backgrounds.

1. Continue to offer diverse, free or low-cost entertainment and cultural events, that are informative, promote multi-cultural, multi-generational dialogue, and do not duplicate services offered by other providers.
2. Establish a food service that is responsive to community preferences, encourages people to linger at the library, and reflects the library's commitment to quality.
3. Invest in strengthening relationships with local service providers and community groups who can partner with EBPL to design and deliver high quality programs consistent with the library's mission and goals.

**E. Access to Materials, Information and Services**

Maintain a suitable balance of in-person and virtual customer services that make library resources readily accessible to the community.

1. Help customers find what they need as quickly and easily as possible.
  - a. Refine the layout of materials on the floor to facilitate ease of access.
  - b. Explore new uses of signage, technology and staff deployment that speed customer access to material.
2. Increase the availability of automated and self-pay services that are easy and appealing to use.
3. Maximize the hours in which the library facility is accessible to the community, as funding permits.
4. Enhance resources that allow customers to access library resources remotely, as funding permits.

**F. Staffing, Structure and Professional Development**

Maximize use of staff time to maintain the richness of personal customer service.

1. Maximize the effectiveness of available staff.
  - a. Continue to assess staff skills and train staff to ensure that key areas of expertise are available to meet the needs of our customers.
  - b. Continue to provide ongoing staff development programs.

2. Continue innovating ways of working that require less staff time while still providing excellent customer service.
3. Expand the use of volunteers and interns through a well-managed program of recruitment, supervision and mentoring.
4. Maintain appropriate staffing levels to provide excellent services.

#### **G. Technology**

Technology is an increasingly critical component of library services. The library is committed to providing the community with access to up-to-date electronic means of accessing information and reading materials.

1. Develop a financing strategy to ensure that the library infrastructure can remain up-to-date with customers' technology requirements.
2. Invest in appropriate technology to increase staff productivity and responsiveness to customers.
3. Explore user-friendly alternatives to current online catalogue and check-out system.
4. Continue to implement and innovate easy-to-use online services so customers can access the library even when our building is physically closed.
5. Explore opportunities to share technology services and initiatives with the state or other local libraries.

#### **H. Community Engagement:**

Reinforce the library's relevance and the value it adds to the community and ensure that stakeholders think of the library "often and fondly".

1. Maximize use of technology to reach as many customers as possible
2. Establish a strong library "brand".
  - a. Develop compelling messaging related to the library's role in the community.
  - b. Disseminate messaging through multiple channels.
3. Engage other service providers, promoting the need for cooperation and collaborative decision-making about the use of scarce resources.
4. Explore new outreach opportunities.

## **I. Fundraising and Fees/Fines**

Achieve an appropriate blend of revenues from taxpayers, contributions, fees and fines that ensures EBPL's continued excellence. Be clear about how taxpayer dollars will be used, and what additional funding is needed for the library to achieve its goals.

1. **Fundraising.** Build on the already strong relationship between the East Brunswick Public Library, the Friends and the Foundation to agree on how each entity can contribute to the overall goals of the library.
  - a. Develop a fundraising plan in support of initiatives such as capital purchases that are aligned with the strategic plan and appeal to donors.
  - b. Publicize those services that have been made possible due to contributions from individuals, sponsors and funders, including the Friends and the Foundation.
2. **Fees and Fines.** Establish a coherent rationale for setting fees and fines in a way that achieves their desired objectives.

## **J. Board Goals**

Act as effective ambassadors for the library while fulfilling core governance responsibilities.

1. Enhance the effectiveness of mechanisms that allow board members to stay informed about the issues facing the library and how the library is responding.
2. Partner with staff and outside professionals if desired to develop and implement a communications strategy (as described in "Community Engagement: Marketing and Outreach", above.)
3. Become more effective advocates for support of the library based on a thorough understanding of how financial decisions impact library services.