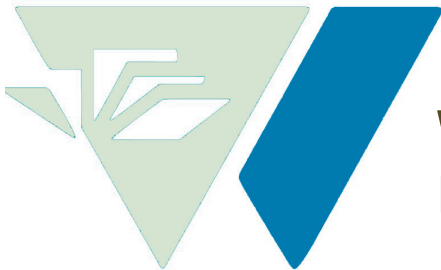


**WEST DES MOINES PUBLIC LIBRARY  
STRATEGIC PLAN 2017 – 2022**



**WEST DES MOINES  
PUBLIC LIBRARY**

# Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	page 2
A Message from the Board of Trustees	page 3
A Message from the Library Director	page 4
Library Vision & Mission	page 5
Executive Summary	page 6
Background & Situation Analysis	page 7
Project Methodology	page 13
Research Highlights	page 16
<b>Strategic Priorities:</b>	
Responding to Growing Demand	page 18
Technology Access & Training	page 24
Support for Education	page 26
Partnerships & Community Connections	page 28
Fundraising & Advocacy	page 32
Community Awareness & Understanding of Library Services	page 34

# Acknowledgments

The West Des Moines Public Library (WDMPL) wishes to thank the City of West Des Moines for its ongoing support for public library programs and services in our community. We would also like to express our appreciation to the West Des Moines Public Library Friends Foundation which provided financial support for this important planning initiative.

And finally, a special thanks to the City residents who attended our focus groups or responded to our telephone and online surveys, community leaders who participated in our leadership interviews, and staff of the Library who shared their ideas and insights with our planning team.

## **West Des Moines Public Library Board of Trustees**

Louise Gately, President  
Bryan Myers, Vice President  
Stephanie Maxwell, Secretary  
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## A Message From The West Des Moines Public Library Board Of Trustees

West Des Moines citizens take pride in their outstanding library, a focal point in the City and considered by many to be the heart of the community. The Library's dedicated staff, quality resources, and excellent programming offer residents a wide range of choices and opportunities that can benefit everyone living in and around West Des Moines.

It is the responsibility of the Library's Board of Trustees to ensure the Library continues to provide the highest level of service to our community. To that end, a Strategic Plan has been developed which represents our vision of the future for the West Des Moines Public Library over the next five years. Based on an examination of the Library's current functioning, the Plan takes into consideration changes in our community, related challenges, and how, in the context of best serving the community, the Library will address those challenges.

*The Strategic Plan will assist the Library to improve and build upon the provision of excellence that we are always striving to offer the community.*

The Plan lays the groundwork to guide the Library as it moves forward, accentuating strengths and addressing challenges, all the while continuing to provide an open, welcoming environment where residents of all ages and backgrounds may meet, learn, teach, and be entertained...and enlightened.

The West Des Moines Public Library Strategic Plan is the result of many meetings, surveys, discussions, and hours of work on the part of many individuals—Library staff, Board members, community leaders, focus group participants, Library patrons, citizens and the consulting team.

All involved deserve thanks for their dedication and hard work.

### **West Des Moines Public Library Board of Trustees**

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Bryan Myers, Vice President

Stephanie Maxwell, Secretary

Melissa Gillespie

Mark Lowe

Joe Murphy

Kay Rosene

## A Message From The Library Director

In his 1988 book *Megatrends*, Futurist John Naisbitt casts a sardonic eye on the kind of “strategic planning” that many organizations and corporations were involved in at that time because they lacked the necessary strategic *vision*. He argued that modern technology affords us so much data that the “wash of information,” as Naisbitt calls it, can confuse and mislead analysts and cloud over the essential.

The new Strategic Plan for the West Des Moines Public Library represents an intelligent mix of original information gained by direct contact with stakeholders and community opinion leaders and the analytical tools businesses and politicians use to figure out what makes a community “tick.” If the question is “What does the West Des Moines Public Library need to do to better serve its community?”, then this document represents as efficient—yet thorough—a path to the answers as could be conceived.

In the many discussions I had with members of The Ivy Group consulting team, we all agreed that this document should be as frank about weaknesses to be overcome as it is optimistic about the future. To serve the Library well over the next five years, the Plan must address the demographic shifts and widening economic divides that challenge West Des Moines while acknowledging a funding environment that constrains optimal facilities and staffing solutions. We believe the Plan proposes creative and productive responses that will reap measurable benefits to the residents of our service area.

It is with the utmost confidence that I look forward to working with City officials, Library Board, Library staff, administration and stakeholders to make this Plan a living document, guiding those of us committed to building and improving library service for the many thousands of intelligent, curious, busy, interesting people we serve now and in the years to come.

Darryl Eschete



Director  
West Des Moines Public Library

## **VISION**

The West Des Moines Public Library will promote the joy of reading, the love of learning and the sharing of ideas by providing access to information and knowledge for people of all ages.

## **MISSION**

The West Des Moines Public Library is a relevant and integral part of the community. The Library enriches the lives of residents by providing convenient and timely access to information and ideas, by offering engaging activities and opportunities for personal and professional growth, by promoting a love of reading and learning, and by remaining responsive to the changing needs of its users.

## Executive Summary

West Des Moines Public Library's new Strategic Plan maps a bold direction for the Library over the next five years and beyond by establishing strategic priorities which align with local planning goals and focus on the identified needs of the residents of West Des Moines. The Plan builds on the Library's reputation as a valued and respected community asset while formulating strategies to address significant challenges and sustain quality services.

The consulting team worked closely with the Library through a multi-dimensional planning process that elicited widespread input from both internal and external stakeholders. The process integrated a variety of qualitative and quantitative research methodologies, including:

- Analysis of Census and other demographic data;
- Review of City and Library plans, studies and reports;
- One-on-one interviews with fifteen civic leaders;
- A market segmentation study;
- Focus groups with seniors, teens, and parents of young children; and
- Telephone and online surveys of the public.

All public service organizations in the City are stretched “to the max” as a result of profound demographic shifts. West Des Moines is growing rapidly, becoming more diverse, and seeing increased numbers of economically disadvantaged households. Retirees relocating to the City for its high-quality amenities, easy lifestyle, and reasonable cost of living bring high customer service expectations. The Plan addresses the challenge of customizing offerings to the interests and preferences of a growing number of individual population segments while sustaining its signature high-touch, personalized service levels.

To better serve the community, West Des Moines Public Library is also looking beyond its walls. In the future, library programs and services could be offered at non-library venues, such as daycare centers, senior centers, or correctional facilities and also made available via mobile service delivery to increase access for currently underserved individuals.

In the face of reduced financial support at all governmental levels, libraries across the country are finding creative ways to deliver services. The prevailing mantra is to partner and collaborate to maximize resources. This Plan paves the way for the Library to explore the benefits of partnering with other regional libraries to share materials, spaces, staff and trustee training, and technological expertise.

## Background & Situation Analysis

### *The City of West Des Moines*

West Des Moines is an aspirational community which takes pride in its small town atmosphere, quality of life, and high value amenities. West Des Moines is frequently cited in national surveys as a highly desirable place to live and work. Residents are friendly and known for extending the famous “Iowa Nice” to friends and visitors alike.

Geographically complex, the City’s boundaries extend into Polk, Dallas, and Warren counties. Commercial construction projects and numerous new housing developments, such as the Edgewater senior living community, are visible everywhere. Undergoing revitalization is Historic Valley Junction, West Des Moines’ “city center”, the most popular destination for shopping, dining, and large community events.

Explosive population growth is the single most significant factor affecting West Des Moines, now the seventh largest city in Iowa. The current population of 64,514 represents a 12% increase between 2010 and 2014. Projections from the West Des Moines Office of Community Planning and Economic Development indicate that the population will reach 88,973 by 2035. City officials report that one-third of the growth comes from within West Des Moines, one-third from other parts of Iowa, and one-third from other states or countries. Some opine that the City’s population will reach 100,000 in the next twenty years.

Historically homogenous, Caucasian, and affluent, the population of West Des Moines has evolved into a rich cultural mosaic. The City’s resettlement program is the largest in the United States. Churches and other social service providers are assisting refugees from countries in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Central America in securing housing, healthcare services, employment, and transportation. Between 2000 and 2010, the percentage of City residents who are Caucasian dropped from 93% to 84% while non-white residents increased from 3,406 to 6,567, and the number of Hispanics, Asians, and African Americans more than doubled. The latest Census shows 11% of residents are foreign born; 13% speak a language other than English in their households; and 7.7% of residents—nearly 5,000 individuals—live in poverty.



More older individuals, interested in being closer to their children and enticed by the City's high quality amenities, healthcare services, and favorable cost of living, are also moving into West Des Moines. The latest Census indicates that 11% of the City's residents are over the age of 65.

In anticipation of continued growth, West Des Moines has taken steps to annex land in several areas abutting the City's boundaries. However, the growth rate is stressing already-stretched public services—e.g., travel in some outlying areas is on as-yet unpaved roads. Some civic leaders are daunted by the prospect of maintaining high quality services for a growing number of residents while holding the line on tax increases. Compounding their concern is the fact that the State is lowering business tax rates, a decision which has already had an adverse effect on municipal finances.

The City's *Direction Finder Survey*, conducted every two years to assess community satisfaction with government services, reveals high levels of satisfaction with resident services overall—including the West Des Moines Public Library. City leaders are committed to sustaining resident satisfaction with the addition of other lifestyle amenities. Currently under discussion are a new ice park, performance venue, and enhanced park system.

Review of *WDM 2036: Becoming the Most Vibrant Suburban City in North America and West Des Moines Community Schools: Community Education and Community Needs Assessment* suggests several ways in which the West Des Moines Public Library can align its strategic priorities to support the future success of the City. These include:

- Fostering partnerships and collaboration;
- Enhancing the quality of community life;
- Managing resources for sustainability;
- Leveraging technology;
- Contributing to a skilled workforce; and
- Supporting education.

Residents of West Des Moines are highly educated: 52% hold a bachelor's degree or higher, compared with 27% of Iowa residents overall. The importance the City attaches to education is reflected in the heavy investment it has made in its educational assets. School quality is one of the main reasons that families with children choose to live in West Des Moines.

In addition to eleven private schools and a large home schooling network that supports more than 2,000 home schooling families, West Des Moines has two public school districts: the West Des Moines Community Schools—serving a declining student population—and the Waukee School District which is building a new school almost every year to serve its rapidly growing population.

The City has demonstrated proficiency in pursuing economic and business development opportunities, and, leveraging the proximity of so many institutions of higher education—West Des Moines Area Community College, Drake University, Grand View College, Simpson College, and the Des Moines campus of Kaplan University—the City showcases its highly educated, skilled work force and vibrant and supportive business environment to encourage technology, financial services, and other clean businesses and industries to relocate to West Des Moines. Currently, the largest employers are West Des Moines Community Schools, Hy-Vee, Wells Fargo, Microsoft, and Aviva.

While new and expanding employment opportunities have attracted many highly-educated individuals, pockets of poverty and unemployment remain in the larger community. The *Des Moines Register Data Central* reports that over 37% of West Des Moines Community Schools students qualify for free or reduced meals, and, in certain schools, the numbers range from 60% to over 66%—numbers that contrast starkly with the Waukee Community School District's average of 16%. On top of the City's rapid growth and increased cultural diversity, these economic disparities significantly impact the Library service model, especially when considering programming and the importance of outreach.

## **West Des Moines Public Library**

Library service in West Des Moines began in 1934 when the Valley Junction Civic Club opened the Town's first library in the home of a Club member. The opening day collection consisted of 450 volumes from the personal libraries of Club members and other residents of Valley Junction.

Today, the West Des Moines Public Library is a top-tier institution which meets or exceeds the standards set forth in the Iowa State Library Code. Housed in a 52,000 square foot, two-story facility that is owned and maintained by the City, the Library is favorably situated next to a municipal complex, surrounded by attractive grounds, and convenient to nearby schools. The Library's four meeting rooms are in constant use by community groups.

Library governance is provided by a Board of Trustees comprising seven members who are appointed by City Council for four year terms. The Library Director serves as the head of a department of City government.

Of the Library's \$2,679,828 operating budget for 2016-17, approximately 73% is dedicated to salaries and employee benefits—a percentage in line with other public libraries across the country. The City of West Des Moines is the Library's principal source of funding. As a participant in open access in Iowa and ILS, WDMPL receives a Gift Trust annually. Currently, there is a balance of \$190,000 in the Gift Trust account, \$50,000 of which must be spent this year.

An energized, well connected, and loyal Library Friends Foundation also provides financial support. Currently, the Foundation has \$800,000 in endowment, 6% of which is distributed to the Library every year. The Foundation also funds special events and unique initiatives, such as author talks and *Tale Trail*, a multi-station series of weatherproof emplacements that enable park-goers to read a children's book as they walk the trail. Friends support WDMPL by purchasing new materials and underwriting Library programs, including summer reading.

The Library is a popular City destination. In 2015-2016, it hosted more than 311,550 visitors, making it one of the busiest venues in the City. More than 34,000 people attend library programs per year, including 2,600 children who participate in summer reading. While other libraries across the country have reported a decline in the number of reference questions they receive, WDMPL has experienced a steady increase in the demand for reference assistance, with over 12,000 requests in 2015-2016. Currently, there are 39,000+ registered card holders, with an impressive 4,500+ new customer registrations annually.

It should also be noted that 25% of the Library's circulation is to non-City residents. Despite minimal staffing, the Library is doing such an outstanding job that it attracts users from beyond the City's borders. This is in keeping with the City's other amenities and employment, healthcare, educational, and retail choices that attract non-residents.

Current thinking among municipal officials is that the pace of growth and change will see a doubling of population by 2036. That growth includes neighborhoods targeted to older adults and retirees, millennials and young professionals, and upper middle class families. The older Valley Junction area attracts individuals who prefer more established walkable neighborhood over newer, suburban developments. With limited public transportation and an expanding highway infrastructure, neighborhoods may become more isolated and residents may choose not to access programs and services at the main library facility, whether deterred by traffic or isolated from public transportation.

The Library's collection is driven by the needs and preferences of customers of all ages. In 2015-2016, customers borrowed more than 685,000 items and accessed library databases online more than 133,000 times. Providing ready access to research, free downloadables, job searches, or language instruction, the collection is heavily used, with 15-20% of library materials checked out at any given time. The shelves in the Children's Department are often depleted—especially during the summer when almost half the collection is checked out. WDMPL makes it possible for its customers to obtain, literally, millions of additional items by interlibrary loan request.

West Des Moines Public Library has applied best professional practices to collection development and management. There are 153,600+ combined print and non-print items in the Library's current collection which represents 2.71 items per person in the Library's service area. WDMPL allocates 15% of its annual budget for the purchase of new materials—3% higher than the minimum established as a national best practice—and approximately 15,000 new items, or 10%, are added to the collection each year. At the same time, staff withdraws 16% of the collection: items that are obsolete, damaged, or infrequently circulated. The Library has an up-to-date policy for collection development and honors ALA's *Freedom to Read* statement and guidelines.

The Library has embraced technologies that upgrade operational efficiency and service to customers. Currently, all new materials come to the Library shelf-ready. An automatic sorting machine reduces time required to check in and re-shelve materials. Self-checkout stations accommodate DIY customers who want to “grab and go”. Wireless printing, a DOT Driver’s License Renewal kiosk, test proctoring, and circulating STEM kits are other innovative initiatives.

A hard-working staff is undoubtedly the Library’s most valuable asset. Employees are highly productive and demonstrate a positive attitude about their work. Salaries for most job titles are competitive compared to other Iowa libraries. However, insufficient staff levels for the number of hours the Library is open challenges management and adversely affects programming, outreach, and other library operations. Even though staff morale is generally very favorable, some employees express concerns about staff burnout.

The West Des Moines Public Library is at a crossroads: it could focus on successes to date—which are, by all standards, remarkable—but, in doing so, it would run the risk of becoming less relevant in the face of shifting demographics and community priorities. Alternatively, it could anticipate that rapid growth will affect every aspect of its operations—staffing, programming, collections, funding, administration and facilities. First and foremost, it must demonstrate its capacity to respond to change and to support City goals, three of which are to:

- Create a sense of community;
- Enrich the lives of West Des Moines citizens by promoting a wide variety of innovative programs and activities; and
- Exercise sound long-range budgeting and financial planning.

With these goals always in sight and on a foundation of high productivity, loyal and energetic support, and engaged customers, WDMPL has built this five-year Strategic Plan.

# Project Methodology

A multi-dimensional community needs assessment guided the Board of Trustees and staff in making critical decisions regarding which services the Library should offer in the future and how the community will access those services.

## Environmental Scan and Initial Site Visit

The Ivy Group analyzed census data and projections for the city of West Des Moines as well as the following City plans and reports:

- *Focus on the Future: Meeting the Challenges of the 21st Century. A Strategic Plan for the West Des Moines Public Library 2011-2016.*
- *WDM 2036: Becoming the Most Vibrant Suburban City in North America.*
- *West Des Moines Survey Analysis.* November, 2015.
- *The City of West Des Moines: Development Retrospective Fiscal Year 2014-2015.*
- *Positioned Perfectly: West Des Moines IA.*
- *West Des Moines Community Schools: Community Education: Community Needs Assessment.* August, 2015.
- *WDM Public Library Master Plan Report.*
- *Space Needs Assessment and Space Utilization Analysis: West Des Moines Public Library.* 2011, George Lawson.
- *2015 Library Master Plan Report, West Des Moines Public Library.* Studio Melee.

In their initial site visit, consultants Nancy Davis and Marilyn Jenkins met with the Planning Committee to confirm project goals, facilitate a SWOT analysis, and review general lifestyle trends and best practices that WDMPL would consider in determining institutional priorities. Orientation tours of the Library's facility and service area were also on the agenda.

Because the success of any plan ultimately depends on the extent to which staff embrace the new priorities, the consulting team and the Planning Committee also met with staff groups to hear perspectives on what the Library does well and where improvements are needed.

### **Executive Interviews**

A total of 15 executive interviews were conducted with civic leaders, government officials, small business owners, non-profit executives, and Library advocates. These interviews afforded the consulting team with opportunities for in-depth conversations with individuals who influence public opinion in the Library's service area and who could be invaluable champions for its new strategic initiatives. The goals of the interviews were to:

- Gain an understanding of the needs of community residents and of the social, political, economic, and demographic trends taking place in the community;
- Assess the level of awareness of Library services among leaders and the level of support for the expansion of services to currently unserved or under-served residents;
- Identify opportunities for the Library to align its priorities with those of the City in areas such as educational achievement, economic development, inter-departmental cooperation, customer service, etc.; and
- Evaluate ways the Library can maximize resources and achieve institutional efficiencies in such areas as collaborations and partnerships, educational attainment, economic growth and community development.

## **Market Segmentation Analysis**

Nielsen *My Best Segments* consumer analytics are useful for characterizing lifestyles, media consumption patterns and related demographic and geographic information. This data enables the Library to customize programs and services for specific populations and determine the best communications platforms for connecting with them.

## **Focus Groups**

Focus groups provided WDMPL with insights into how community residents—specifically current Library users—regard services the Library currently makes available. The Ivy Group conducted three focus groups with key target audiences: seniors, teens, and parents of young children. The questions posed to discussion participants centered on collections, programs, technology and the Library facility.

## **Telephone and Online Surveys of the Public**

Over a four-day period, 195 telephone interviews were completed with randomly selected households in the Library’s service area. These interviews yielded a margin of error of +/- 7% at the 95% confidence level across the entire population 18+ years old, but not for individual population segments. In addition to identifying unmet needs and barriers to library use, the survey increased public awareness and understanding of the wide array of Library offerings.

To provide even greater opportunity for residents to have a voice in the planning process, an online version of the telephone survey was promoted in the Library, on the WDMPL website, on social media platforms, and in local community publications. 554 residents completed the survey over the course of eight weeks.

## **Planning Summit and Plan Completion**

On completion of the research, The Ivy Group and Strategic Planning Committee reviewed the research as a basis for reaching consensus regarding major new strategic initiatives. Subsequently, a draft Plan was submitted for review and formal presentation to the Library Board of Trustees.



## Research Highlights

- Demographic shifts of significance to planning are overall population growth, an increase in the number of seniors, greater cultural diversity, and a widening economic divide.
- The Library's most important roles are to support education, serve as a "community connector", and provide technology access and training, especially for economically disadvantaged households.
- West Des Moines Public Library is valued and respected by internal and external stakeholders.
- The Library is widely regarded as an exceptional provider of programs and services for young children and their families.
- Teens and seniors are not as well served as young children.
- The lack of public transportation prevents some residents from accessing library services.
- A highly productive staff is an invaluable organizational asset.
- While staffing levels meet minimum Iowa State standards, they are insufficient for implementing new programs and services that would benefit the community. A comparison of Iowa's eleven largest urban libraries reveals that WDMPL has the fewest employees.
- The Library lacks visibility and is characterized as insular.
- In a "tech savvy city" the Library is not viewed as a tech leader.
- The WDMPL Friends Foundation is energized, well connected, and committed to the success of the Library.
- There are opportunities for the Library to diversify funding, improve marketing, maximize public and private sector partnerships, and explore alternate service models.
- Elected officials and survey respondents suggest that it will be difficult for the Library to secure funding for a costly expansion to the current facility.
- Valley Junction is generally regarded as the most favorable location for the Library's first branch.
- West Des Moines Community Schools is launching a study to explore the future of school library services.

# Strategic Priorities



# Responding To Growing Demand

## Children & Teens

### *Challenges*

In an era of constant and accelerating change, public libraries must be highly adaptable, especially in a community that is growing exponentially and which prides itself on being progressive. WDMPL has built a strong base of support among families with young children, but the demand for quality children's resources and programs is pushing at the very seams of the Library's capacity:

- Circulation of children's materials has increased 13% in just the past three years;
- 53% of all circulation is children-centric;
- 80% of all programming is children-centric; and
- 95% of all program attendance is children-centric.

An additional challenge is how best to channel the energy of the teens who gather at the Library after school for productive activities that entertain but also support academic achievement. Teens express an interest in additional programming.

The Library has diligently sought to satisfy the increased demand by expanding children and teen programming, reassigning staff to these areas, and hiring a teen services specialist. In addition, the Library offers an exceptional 68 hours of weekly services (versus the Iowa minimum of 61) and is open 7 days a week (versus the State's 6-day minimum). Despite its efforts, programs are over-subscribed and many children are turned away.

The implementation of self-check and sorting technology has helped to create more staffing flexibility, but staffing levels are still inadequate. The Library's total number of FTE's remained stagnant between 2013 and 2015. The Library meets the minimum staffing standard as determined by the State Library of Iowa, but it falls far below the State's benchmark for an "outstanding" library. For a City that strives to excel, having an operating budget that covers only the minimum staffing standard is a low bar.

### *Opportunities*

West Des Moines Public Library can leverage the research findings and recommendations of the new Strategic Plan to make an even more compelling case for increased funding for additional staff positions. The Library's role as an educational partner is widely viewed as its most important contribution to the community. At the present time, the Library lacks sufficient staff to satisfy the growing demand for children's and young adult services—particularly outreach and programming. The Strategic Plan provides the necessary support for obtaining the resources to bolster academic achievement and to sustain the quality and quantity of WDMPL's signature programs and services for the community's young people.

### **The Facility**

#### *Challenges*

In the context of the City's anticipated population growth (projected in the City of West Des Moines Fact Book at a 57.17% increase from 2010 to 2035), it is understandable why the Library contracted for two studies (as recently as 2011 and 2015) to assess the adequacy of its current facility. These studies (the 2011 Space Needs Assessment and Space Utilization Analysis: West Des Moines Public Library by George Lawson, Library Planner and the 2015 Library Master Plan Report by Studio Melee) focused almost exclusively on an expansion of the current facility—the cost of which was estimated to be as high as \$8M. Now, however, the research suggests that the Library should reconsider any major expansion to the main library. Civic leaders as well as the John Wilson Research *2015 West Des Moines Survey Analysis* indicate that it is very unlikely the Library will get the voter support necessary for a building program with a large price tag.

In the short term, WDMPL can refurbish the building and its furnishings; address the need for additional children's programming space as quickly as possible; and continue to implement several less costly recommendations of the George Lawson study. The existing facility can be repurposed to accommodate more diversified programming, and a larger, more contained space for teens would address challenges associated with serving that market segment.

Access, however, is already an issue for teens and some seniors, and, as the City continues to expand, the need for more evenly distributed access to Library services also grows. While the City systematically plans for the establishment

of new highway infrastructure, population growth ultimately means more traffic. Research conducted nationwide demonstrates that library customers will drive a maximum of three miles to use their public library. In isolated pockets of West Des Moines, residents may find driving to the Main Library less and less appealing.

### *Opportunities*

There are opportunities for the Library to meld its own planning with the City's. The revival of Valley Junction is an example. West Des Moines is attempting to create a walkable environment in Valley Junction, renovating Main Street buildings for neighborhood convenience and small business development. The Library can and should be an integral part of such planning and development, and institute strategies to expand services into that part of the City on an expedited basis.

Planning for a facility begins with creating with the City a master building program which sites additional service outlets in outlying areas experiencing the most dramatic population growth.

## **Programming And Outreach**

### *Challenges*

Residential building expansions in the southern and western portions of the City are designed to attract middle to upper income residents, and the intentional communities being developed for older adults appeal to those with comfortable retirement incomes.

Because there are a limited number of community gathering places in West Des Moines, residents attach great importance to WDMPL programs and opportunities to get together, learn, and exchange ideas. The Library has responded by redeploying staff and automating certain functions. However, the community assessment indicates a need for the Library to be even more responsive by establishing stronger ties with agencies working with similar populations.

In addition to standards that encourage robust in-library programming, an executive interview with State Library personnel suggested that there is a need for the Library to offer outreach services. The Library's focus on in-house children's programming (predominantly for pre-school ages) and its limited staffing has hampered its ability to conduct any significant amount of intentional and on-going outreach.

Demographic shifts call for investigating opportunities for service outside the main library:

- Mobile delivery and refreshing of deposit collections;
- Off-site programming in facilities operated by partnering agencies;
- Coordinated programming utilizing staff of other agencies to provide content and expertise; and
- A volunteer corps to assist in off-site programming and/or resource delivery.

The implementation of any of these initiatives will require dedicated staffing beyond current levels for coordination and partnership building.

### *Opportunities*

Programming in collaboration with the schools, the YMCA, and other agencies (including some of the major employers in the City) could augment Library efforts. There are opportunities to develop makerspaces in a variety of ways such as a mini recording studio, 3-D printing, STEM learning activities, etc. — all of which would not only reinforce school curriculum but even prepare teens for employment. Partnerships with the area’s major employers are mutually beneficial as many corporations look for ways to give back to the communities they serve, and the Library could pursue grants for equipment and technology that support exciting student activities in the Library space.

## **Collections**

### *Challenges*

More and more, libraries are trending toward a customer-driven model of collection development. Libraries cannot afford the luxury of spending money on books that do not circulate. WDMPL uses metrics to make acquisition decisions, following the rule of thumb to concentrate collection development efforts in proportion to circulation. Metrics also guide decisions about whether to withdraw or replace materials.

Looking ahead, as it continues to serve an increased number of customers, the Library will have to invest additional funds to maintain a collection which satisfies customer expectations. Nationally, the initial rush to embrace e-books has abated. The prevailing wisdom is that one third of readers prefer e-books only, one third prefer print books only, and one third use both, depending on what and where they are reading.

### *Opportunities*

Residents of West Des Moines still place a high value on books and reading and want the Library to maintain a healthy balance between its print and non-print materials. It should sustain its migration to digital resources, a strategy which will expand access to individuals who do not live near the Library. Acquiring more reference materials, magazines, and newspapers in electronic formats will also reduce the number of square feet devoted to shelving, thus freeing up space that may be used for programming, quiet study spaces, small meeting rooms, a tech studio, or a genius bar.

Additions to the Library collection can better respond to demographic shifts in West Des Moines. The current collection does not include foreign language titles, although policy calls for the Library to assess the need for foreign language titles on an ongoing basis. The Library has the opportunity to discuss once again how it will serve English language learners and whether there is a need to expand the collection to reflect the community's new cultural diversity. And while the Library already purchases large print titles for the City's population of seniors, it may have to increase its spending on this part of the collection in response to growing demand.

## **Recommendations**

### Years 1–2

- Establish goal of staffing the WDMPL at a level closer to the state standard for an outstanding library.
- Expand and diversify adult programming.
- Once created and the position filled, task the Coordinator of Outreach Services with the development of a collaborative plan for targeted outreach, leveraging community partnerships and alternate venues.
- Maintain funding for collection development at the current 15% of the total operating budget.
- Maximize funds available for materials acquisition by continuing to apply principles of customer-driven collection development.
- Intensify efforts to promote the awareness and use of digital resources.
- Consider the potential of developing a world language collection, possibly in partnership with neighboring libraries.
- Explore other service models including shared spaces, mobile services, kiosks or lockers, retrofitted retail spaces, etc.
- Work with City Planners to map the location of current library customers.
- Develop a long-term master plan for the expansion of services.
- Develop a plan and budget for launching services in Valley Junction which would be Phase One of the master plan.

### Years 3–5

- Accelerate efforts to refurbish the existing facility and provide additional space for children’s programming, even if on an interim basis.
- Continue to develop the foreign language collection.



## Technology Access & Training

### *Challenges*

Keeping pace with rapidly evolving technology is a challenge for all libraries; ill-advised decisions are costly and disruptive. West Des Moines is a tech-savvy community, and currently the schools—rather than the Library—are considered to be in the technology vanguard. While the technology available at the Library has improved, WDMPL still has some catching up to do to remain relevant.

As West Des Moines has become more economically diverse, more households have come to depend on Library computers and internet access to submit job applications, take practice tests, search for housing, apply to college, etc. Rated highly among services the public would like to see the Library expand are computer and tech training and assistance with applying for unemployment, social security, and health insurance benefits. Other residents will turn to the Library for more advanced technology they do not have at home. There is interest in a genius bar, makerspace or gaming area—all tech enhancements with the “wow” factor which entice teens and young professionals to the Library. At the same time, research indicates that both Library users and nonusers have a limited awareness of the technology the Library already makes available, and the Library should better promote its technology offerings.

Currently, however, the solitary tech support staffer is overwhelmed simply dealing with the day-to-day of maintaining the Library’s technology and is in no position to take advantage of these opportunities to advance the Library’s technologies or promote their use.

### *Opportunities*

Civic leaders and the public strongly suggest that providing access to up-to-date technology must be among the WDMPL’s top priorities and that the Library must develop its tech capabilities to align with its vision, mission, and institutional goals. The Library is the only place in the City which offers free access to technology for computing, printing, scanning, and electronic communications. The Library can establish a reputation as a technology leader in a City that values technology.

The Board and staff can engage schools and corporations—acknowledged early adaptors of new technologies—in future technology planning initiatives. The Library also has an opportunity to be the preferred resource for technology training for residents who do not receive training in school or on the job. The City’s IT Department provides significant assistance to the Library, such as

maintenance, troubleshooting, and supporting the Library's migration to leasing, rather than owning, hardware. To advance along the technology continuum, the Library can initiate discussions with the City's IT Department about their collaboration and division of responsibilities.

## **Recommendations**

### Years 1–2

- Create a visionary technology blueprint which:
  - Anticipates emerging trends and increased demand for tech access and training in the current facility and perhaps an additional service point;
  - Supports the Library's overall strategic priorities;
  - Establishes goals and strategies for the effective use of technology in the future;
  - Considers implications for funding, facilities, staffing, customers, and management;
  - Includes marketing and outreach recommendations; and
  - Formulates success measures.
- Create a budget line item establishing technology as an operating expense.
- Sustain efforts to migrate to leasing agreements which include maintenance.

### Years 3–5

- Evaluate the need for additional tech support staff.
- Explore the feasibility of using teens as “tech pages”.
- Consider establishing a community technology task force/technology partner.
- Provide more user-friendly interactive technology.
- Secure funding for A/V suites with video casting, podcasting, coding/game design, etc.
- Upgrade the design, navigability, ADA-accessibility and browser-responsiveness of the Library's website.

# Support For Education

## *Challenges*

West Des Moines residents are well-educated and cite the reputation of the community's schools as a reason for choosing to raise their families in the City. Civic leaders and the public believe that serving pre-school and elementary school students, teens, and seniors should be a priority of the Library.

The concern that the City's rapid population growth—particularly in the Waukee Community School District—will make it increasingly difficult to sustain the quality of the schools is further complicated by growing cultural and economic diversity. The demand for ESL classes is growing, and more children are living in economically disadvantaged circumstances. Nevertheless, financial pressures have forced the West Des Moines Community Schools to curtail community education programs, and the investment in school libraries has been reduced, with students reporting very limited access.

## *Opportunities*

In response, West Des Moines Community Schools is establishing a task force to explore what 21st century school libraries will look like and determine the need for a library in every school building. The possibility that students will become even more dependent on the resources of WDMPL should be considered as the Library develops its new Strategic Plan.

Participants in the focus group of parents revealed a high level of satisfaction with the staff, collection programs, and services for pre-school and young elementary school students. By contrast, they characterize services for tweens as less satisfactory. In the teen focus group, students talked about their reliance on Library resources and their interest in providing input as additional programs are developed and the new teen space is designed.

By strengthening its programs and services for older elementary students and teens, the Library can better establish itself as a highly desirable partner for educational institutions and literacy organizations and connect with the area's large homeschooling community. WDMPL has an opportunity to showcase and better articulate its role in supporting education for learners of all ages.

Participants in the seniors' focus group expressed a keen interest in lifelong learning opportunities. Attendees pointed out that West Des Moines has a growing number of age 55+ residents—many of whom live alone, are looking for things to do with their free time, want to meet new people, but don't have access to transportation. They report

that they check the calendars of all area public libraries and most attend programs at more than one. In their opinion, the menu of adult programs at the WDMPL is limited in comparison with those of neighboring libraries—particularly the Urbandale Library.

## **Recommendations**

### Years 1–2

- Research best practices for successful school/library partnerships as the basis of ongoing exploration and discussion with the two school districts.
- Request WDMPL representation on the School Library Task Force.
- Evaluate the need for a formal memo of understanding which would detail respective roles and responsibilities of the Library and schools.
- Ascertain appropriate roles for the Library in ESL instruction.
- Create a position of Assistant Director.
- Create a position for Coordinator of Outreach Services.
- Maximize the potential of utilizing grounds surrounding the Library for service and program delivery.
- Determine the feasibility of repurposing space in the existing facility to expand the children’s programming area and create a dedicated teen space in the area which once served as a café.

### Years 3–5

- Create opportunities for teens to provide input into the design of a new teen space and expansion of teen programs and services.

# Partnerships & Community Connections

## *Challenges*

In an environment of increasing competition for public funds, there is a greater need than ever before to establish priorities and allocate resources that support outcomes desired by the residents of a library's service area. The Harwood Institute for Public Innovation (<http://www.theharwoodinstitute.org>) encourages all public entities to “turn outward”—meaning to use the community, not the conference room, as the main reference point for decisions. Aspen Institute's 2014 *Rising to the Challenge: Re-Envisioning Public Libraries* underscored this approach for public libraries in particular:

*“Managers of local governments report it is often difficult to prioritize libraries over other community services such as museums or parks and recreation departments that also serve a distinctly public mission. As a result, libraries need to be more intentional in the ways they deploy resources in the community, and more deeply embedded in addressing the critical challenges facing the community. This will require a level of flexibility and adaptability to change as community needs change. It will also require collaboration among libraries, policy makers and community partners to redefine the role of libraries as institutions that inspire learning, drive development, grow social capital, and create opportunities.”*

Libraries can no longer depend on a service model that expects the public to come to them. Research across the library profession and within the City itself points to the need for the Library to build stronger community partnerships and collaborations. Interviews conducted with leaders of the City and other community organizations indicate that this should be a critical element of Library planning going forward. Elected officials, the public, and institutions that fund grants believe that partnerships will reduce costs while maximizing resources and expertise.

## *Opportunities*

A needed expansion of the main library building would require a significant commitment of funds. With no prospect of this in the immediate future, the Library will have to provide programs and services on a targeted basis by building connections and leveraging partnership opportunities.

A new service model incorporating Harwood Institute’s “turning outward” approach could be designed in collaboration with other community agencies, such as:

- Area Agency on Aging
- YMCA
- Valley Junction Business Association
- West Des Moines Rotary
- City of West Des Moines Parks & Recreation
- Des Moines Area Religious Council
- United Way of Central Iowa
- West Des Moines medical facilities
- Preschool programs (both public and private)
- Homeschool support groups
- Greater Des Moines Partnership and the Young Professionals Connection

These agencies share a commitment to the overall betterment of the community. Launching an ongoing dialogue with these and other organizations might identify remote service opportunities for the Library, to include regular programming offered in facilities owned or operated by other agencies, deposit collections and materials delivery to older adults, after-school and summer collaborative programming, etc.

WDMPL can capitalize on the involvement of the Friends Foundation to connect with the growing number of young professionals. The Foundation is demonstrating an increasing level of interest in hosting events, such as “meet-ups” and networking opportunities for young professionals that benefit the Library and connect newer members of the community. An active social media presence among this demographic could promote the Library more broadly.

The Library can also explore scheduling “pop-up” library services in retail centers, churches, or other locations, and, with minimal capital investment, attract new customers and extend the Library’s visibility and brand. The Library might also consider small service outlets in more isolated communities (e.g., Valley Junction)

where walk-in neighborhood traffic would be encouraged. Working with City Planners, the Library could identify some low-cost rental options that might suit this purpose.

The City of West Des Moines is included within and/or bounded by four counties. There are intergovernmental agreements between the City and several nearby municipalities including Waukee, Clive, and Norwalk. Residents are served by multiple school districts that cross county lines. There is clearly a culture of intergovernmental cooperation, leveraging resources efficiently and effectively. While there are certain programs and services shared among public libraries in Iowa (interlibrary loan, digital resources, delivery, etc.), they are primarily driven by the State. Currently, there are reciprocal borrowing privileges across libraries, but there is no organized planning effort among the West Des Moines Library and those of neighboring communities (including Waukee, Clive, Norwalk, Urbandale, and Des Moines). A multi-library partnership could explore new models for cooperative programming, staff and board training, shared back-room support functions (possibly even administration), or leveraging resources such as a shared Integrated Library System (i.e., the software platform that allows for tracking patron registrations and circulation of library materials). The City of West Des Moines is clearly a leader in the region, and the Library could model similar leadership among area libraries.

The Library has recently joined other Iowa libraries in participating in MOBIUS (*Missouri Bibliographic Information User System*), a not-for-profit corporation with 501(c)3 exemption status created for sharing library materials, information, and services using accessible, cost effective methods. It maintains the MOBIUS Union Catalog with more than 27 million items, serving users in Missouri and into Oklahoma, Iowa, Kansas and Texas. A courier service delivers materials across the consortium through an interlibrary loan process, a cost-effective way to increase the scope and reach of the Library's collection. Additional services, such as *Missouri Evergreen* has been a good fit for municipal, county, and regional library systems of all sizes. Administered by MOBIUS, *Missouri Evergreen* is supported by the Institute of Museum and Library Services under the provision of the Library Services and Technology Act as administered by the Missouri State Library.

## Recommendations

### Years 1–2

- Develop criteria by which to evaluate constructive partnerships that directly benefit either the Library itself and or its constituents.
- Establish partnership policies, criteria for assessing partnerships, exit strategies, and standard letters of agreement.
- Assign a staff point person to solicit suggestions and potential contacts from Library colleagues and to explore, develop, and manage partnerships.
- Follow up with organizations that expressed an interest in partnering with the Library during executive interviews.
- Research existing partnerships in the greater West Des Moines area to create a list of prospects that are a “good fit” with the Library’s mission, vision, and strategic priorities.
- Identify opportunities for cooperative programming and service delivery, shared administrative and back-room support services, leveraging joint investment in infrastructure (e.g., a shared ILS might benefit the public as well as maximize tax dollar investment).
- Establish ongoing discussion among regional library administrators.
- Meet with City Planners to address Library service relative to community issues, such as transportation, new development, neighborhood revitalization efforts, etc. and Library service delivery relative to quality of life issues for all residents.
- Collaborate with City Planners to map location of current card holders.
- Jointly consider prime locations for service satellites that leverage technology and programming outreach and have been tested in “pop-up” programming prior to committing to longer term space options.

### Years 3–5

- Launch prototype satellite service.
- Annually evaluate the effectiveness of existing partnerships and provide regular reports for the Board on partnership initiatives.



### *Challenges*

At the State level, the commercial property tax has been reduced. While West Des Moines has yet to feel the full effect of the reduction, elected officials anticipate that the City, as with other municipalities across Iowa, will receive even less financial support from the State in the future. Even with the prospect of reduced State funding, civic leaders interviewed indicate strong public resistance to local tax increases and costly construction projects which would require public approval.

Despite these financial concerns, City Council has signaled that it wishes to move ahead with improvements to some City services, such as the \$32 million Five Waters Recreation Area project, featuring a zip line course, ice rink, tiny house campground, and an amphitheater. Most civic leaders also acknowledge the need for expanding access to Library services. However, they believe that the Library will have to compete with other City departments for its share of available funds by making a compelling case for refurbishing the current facility and opening a branch location.

### *Opportunities*

Intensified fundraising efforts on the part of the WDMPL will demonstrate to the City that the Library is willing to share the costs of its expansion. The Friends Foundation, the Library's designated 501(c)(3) fundraising arm, is the conduit for funds that the Library receives from the Gift Trust and from grants.

The Foundation—currently with 399+ members—is energized and has gained the respect of civic leaders. It has demonstrated its willingness and ability to host successful fundraising events and has the potential to contribute to the financial health of the Library at an even higher level. Members of the Board have the capacity to increase WDMPL's visibility by leveraging their connections in the City and engaging potential donors. Board leadership will be critical to the success of a capital campaign should the Library launch a major fundraising effort in support of program expansion.

## **Recommendations**

### Years 1–2

- Access publicly available information about fundraising and advocacy from ALA, Iowa Library Association, Board Source, etc. as the first step in developing a fundraising and advocacy roadmap with specific goals aligned to strategic priorities.
- Research previous philanthropic efforts in the City.
- Continue to explore the potential/need for the Friends Foundation to hire a full- or part-time employee to coordinate fundraising efforts.
- Recruit individuals with fundraising experience to the Friends Foundation Board.
- Determine the timing for contracting with experienced fundraising counsel. Provide training to the Library Board and Friends Foundation on fundraising and advocacy strategy.

### Years 3–5

- Evaluate community capacity and identify sources of major gifts, the formation of campaign committee, development of a campaign infrastructure and case for giving.
- Continue to pursue grant opportunities, especially for library construction in Iowa.

## Community Awareness & Understanding of Library Services

### *Challenges*

All phases of the research conducted in conjunction with the Library's strategic planning initiative suggest the need to expand its visibility in the community. Civic leaders characterize the Library as "insular" and report that, while the Library is a valued and respected community asset, there is a large untapped market of residents with whom the Library is not connecting.

The telephone survey revealed that only 38% of Library users are "extremely satisfied" with Library communications. In focus groups, regular library users acknowledged hearing about Library services that they never knew existed. In fact, elected officials perceive that the Library is less proactive in providing City Council with information about its services and events than are other City departments.

Inadequate marketing is not unique to the WDMPL. With limited funds, manpower, and marketing expertise, the challenge of disseminating information efficiently and effectively is universal among public libraries. Most libraries do not include public information as a line item in their budgets. Few enjoy the luxury of a designated person on staff to manage the marketing and community relations function. Recently, however, library administrators, boards and even financial supporters have recognized the importance of purposeful and effective branding, marketing, and communications programs.

There are several communications challenges that WDMPL must address. The first is the heavy reliance of tech savvy residents of West Des Moines on electronic communications in an environment of few media outlets and diminishing newspaper readership. If the Library wishes to connect with current and prospective customers, it will have to hone its social media skills and refine its online presence. The website must be user friendly, interactive, content rich, and graphically appealing. Facility with social media is a requisite for reaching specific market segments—especially teens.

Demographic changes in West Des Moines also contribute to the challenge of communicating information about the Library. The rapid population growth in the City means that there is a constant influx of new residents who know nothing about the WMDPL. Marketing must be designed to reach out to individuals and families less established in the community—some of whom are English language speakers and some, English language learners.

### *Opportunities*

Despite these impediments, the benefits of intensifying communications efforts justify the effort required. Enhanced communications afford the Library the opportunity to:

- Control the information that flows from the Library to assure consistency and accuracy;
- Affirm the Library's leadership role in the City;
- Maximize the use of resources to ensure maximum return on the City's financial investment;
- Connect the Library with residents who need technology access and training;
- Connect with students of all ages who need support; and
- Showcase the professional skills of librarians.

### **Recommendations**

#### Years 1–2

- Review the Library's mission and vision statements to evaluate their current relevance.
- Develop a blueprint for improving communications with internal and external stakeholders.
- Develop a specific program for communicating with elected officials.
- Increase the use of social media.
- Leverage collaborative media partnerships to promote Library services.
- Intensify efforts to cross market programs and services to existing customers.
- Maximize the effectiveness of in-library marketing.
- Collect stories and testimonials that put a human dimension on all communications materials.

Years 3–5

- Include communications as a line item in the annual operating budget.
- Apply market segmentation data to customize services and messages for individual target audiences.
- Increase the Library’s capacity to disseminate timely and accurate information about its programs and services by securing additional support for communications initiatives and designating responsibility within the organization.
- Upgrade the Library’s website and related outgoing communications technology to promote programs and services to targeted audiences more effectively.

West Des Moines Public Library

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