



Cuyahoga County Public Library
browsing is just the beginning

CUYAHOGA COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY STRATEGIC PLAN

Approved December 18, 2012

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1. INTRODUCTION

In January 2012, Cuyahoga County Public Library initiated a strategic planning process to gather staff and community input into the future direction for the organization. The Library sought to test assumptions about stakeholder perceptions and develop a deeper understanding of the areas where the community most wants to see Cuyahoga County Public Library focus resources.

Cuyahoga County Public Library created two key teams to lead the year-long strategic plan process. A cross-functional Strategic Project Team comprised of key staff and managers worked together to develop the surveys, focus group questions and marketing materials. An Advisory Team comprised of executive management provided strategic direction and guidance in defining the project scope, milestones and deliverables. Throughout the course of the planning process, the Library Board of Trustees received regular updates on the stakeholder feedback and project milestones.

The feedback process began with 36 focus groups held at branches throughout the Cuyahoga County Public Library system. The focus groups were facilitated by external consultants. In total, approximately 200 individuals participated in a focus group session and provided answers to the following questions:

- What are we doing well?
- How can we improve?
- What aren't we doing that we should be doing?
- Are our six priorities relevant to residents in Cuyahoga County?
- What else should we focus on?

Concurrent with the focus groups, the Library asked stakeholders to complete an online survey relating to current and future priorities, services and usage. The survey (in both English and Spanish) was available on the Library website (cuyahogalibrary.org) as well as in hard copy format in all branches. The Library received feedback from 8,730 respondents.

In September 2012, the Library conducted telephone surveys with 400 registered voters in the 47 communities we serve. The purpose of the telephone survey was to validate the feedback gathered through the focus groups and online survey as well as to update data on community attitudes, frequency of library use and reasons for coming to the library.

In addition to direct stakeholder feedback, the Library leveraged a new demographic data tool to help better understand trends and behaviors within the population segments we serve.

Throughout November and December 2012, CCPL's executive team traveled to branches throughout the system to review and discuss a draft of the plan with Library staff. Staff feedback

from these sessions was integrated into the final draft of the Strategic Plan that was presented to the CCPL Board of Trustees in December 2012.

2. CURRENT STATE

Developing a strong sense of where we are today as an organization ensures that the Library can chart a strategic course forward for our future. Cuyahoga County Public Library currently serves 618,210 people across 47 communities in Cuyahoga County. We have 439,065 registered cardholders, which represents a 71% market share of the population.

Our communities, which tend to be slightly older than the U.S. median age, also tend to be more “settled,” meaning many residents have lived in their home for several years and have a deep love and appreciation for their community. This sentiment is reflected in the community’s strong satisfaction with Cuyahoga County Public Library and validates our perception of **the central role that the public library plays in community life**. We understand that **our customers view Cuyahoga County Public Library as a relevant, valued resource**.

The stakeholder feedback collected through the strategic planning process demonstrated that residents view the Library’s role in helping them to **reconnect with reading** as a core business that we must maintain. Nine out of ten telephone survey respondents rated our focus on “reconnect with reading” as extremely important or very important. Further, more than 80% of all telephone survey respondents mentioned coming to a library branch to look for books or other materials as one of the three reasons they visit the Library. Focus group and online survey respondents agreed that the Library must continue to serve as a place that promotes and supports reading – through its materials as well as complementary programs.

Lifelong learning also emerged a key area of strategic focus for CCPL. Support for early childhood literacy and youth/teen programming stood out as top-rated Library programs according to nine out of ten telephone survey respondents. Additionally, focus group and online survey respondents saw skill-building and workforce development as essential functions for the Library. In fact, when asked about other areas where the Library should focus resources, nearly 40% of online survey and focus group participants referenced some form of community-based adult education.

We also heard that our branches are viewed as community hubs, places where the unique needs and interests of the community are not just respected but reflected in the “feel” of the branch. And, if our branches are hubs, then our staff is the heart. Stakeholders in all feedback channels referenced the personal relationships they share with our staff. Ninety-six percent (96%) of telephone survey participants responded positively when rating the library on “having a helpful and friendly library staff.” One way to describe the connection to people and place that our

community feels for CCPL is **civic engagement**. Our branches serve as welcoming spaces where members of the community not only connect with staff, neighbors or groups that share similar interests – but they provide a place where individuals can explore new ideas.

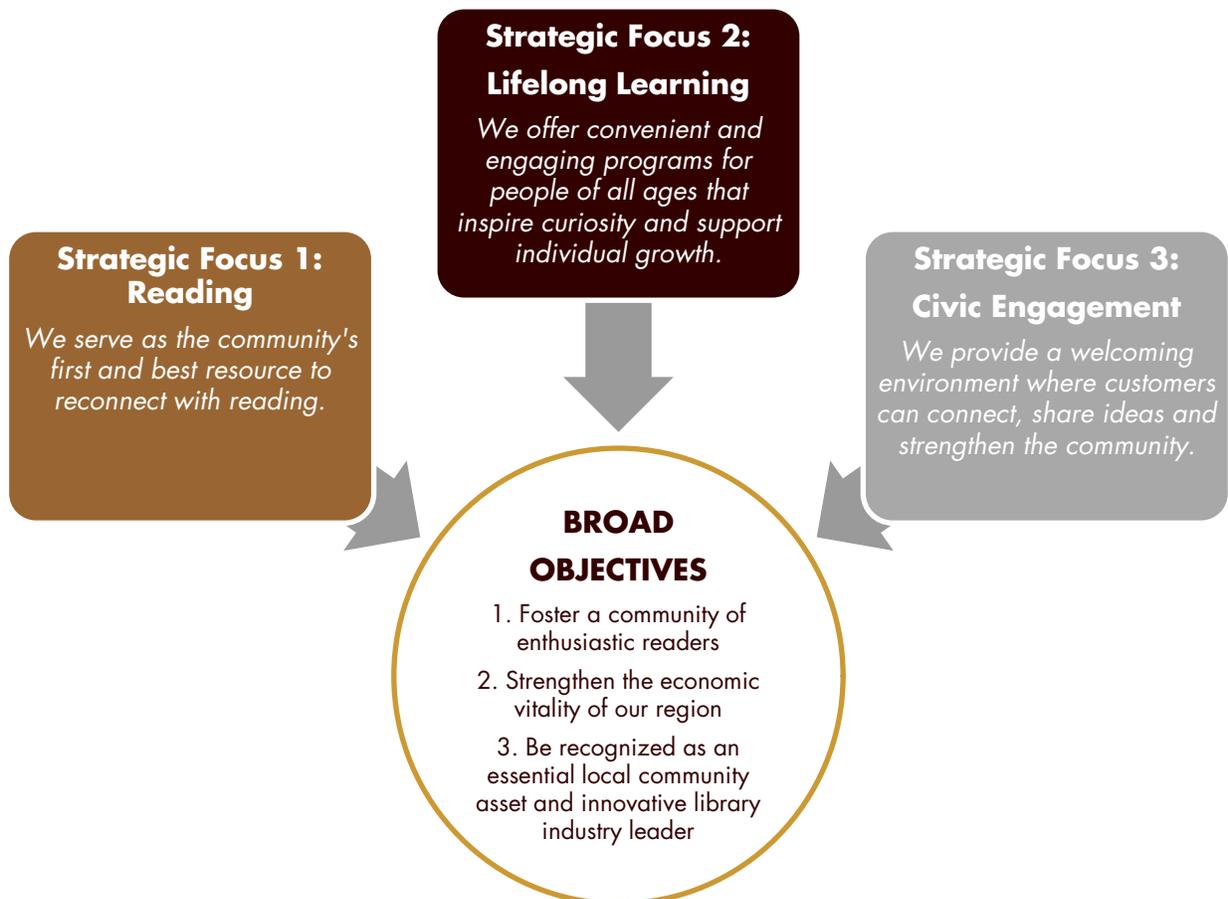
Finally, the Library's current six priorities received high ratings across stakeholder feedback channels; however, we heard a desire to have the Library move in the direction of more universal priorities. Stakeholders appreciate and see value in the Library connecting with special groups (be that young children, seniors, job seekers, etc.), but they felt most engaged with the system when our areas of strategic focus aligned with their personal interests.

3. FOCUS ON THE FUTURE

As Cuyahoga County Public Library celebrates 90 years of service to the community in 2013, we remain committed to our mission of *being at the center of community life by creating an environment where reading, lifelong learning and civic engagement thrive* and our vision to *become the most convenient public library system in the county.*

Because we serve a diverse population with niche customer segments and distinctive needs, the Library must adopt a differentiation strategy that focuses on creating unique product/service attributes that are valued by our customers. Our strategy for the future must be customer-centric. This requires a highly skilled and creative staff that can anticipate and proactively address evolving broad community needs – and understand the specific needs of the neighborhoods we serve. Further, it suggests that attributes such as convenience, outstanding customer service and exceptionally positive customer experiences can help to advance our strategy.

The Library’s differentiation strategy concentrates on three key objectives supported by three areas of strategic focus. This roadmap will enable Cuyahoga County Public Library to continue to make a positive difference in the lives of the residents we serve.



READING



LIFELONG LEARNING



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

