



Ann Arbor District Library

Strategic Plan 2016-2019

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Ann Arbor District Library: Background	3
Process Undertaken.....	4
Ann Arbor District Library: Vision, Mission, and Values.....	5
Strategic Initiatives and Goals	6
Initiative 1: Products and Services	6
1.1 Adjust offerings in order to better serve the senior population.....	6
1.2 Adjust offerings to augment our support of teen patrons.....	6
1.3 Deepen, expand the portfolio of offerings supporting full equity and access across all cultures in our community.....	6
1.4 Cultivate a more systemic partnership with Ann Arbor Public Schools.....	6
1.5 Explore the guiding principles for AADL’s approach to unusual collections.....	7
Initiative 2: Finances	7
2.1 Explore alternative revenue generation options.....	7
2.2 Continue to operate the library in a fiscally responsible manner.....	7
Initiative 3: Facilities.....	7
3.1 Prioritize and implement the long-term facilities maintenance plan.....	7
3.2 Conduct a long-term study to evaluate the placement and attributes of current and future AADL facilities.....	7
3.3 Reimagine the Ann Arbor District Library’s downtown presence.....	8
Initiative 4: Communications and Technology	8
4.1 Refresh AADL’s branding, integrated with a comprehensive communications strategy.....	8
4.2 Articulate a vision for technology investments that confirms AADL’s position as an early adopter, and ensures relevance and vibrancy over the long-term.....	8
4.3 Implement the new web presence.....	8
4.4 Identify opportunities to increase cross-channel interaction.....	9
Initiative 5: Organizational Development	9
5.1 Assess employee benefits structure for competitiveness.....	9
5.2 Provide meaningful opportunities for staff to implement the strategic plan.....	9
5.3 Refine Board of Trustees’ committee structure to enable a more open and inclusive communication.....	9
5.4 Enhance professional development and learning opportunities for members of the Board of Trustees.....	10

Ann Arbor District Library: Background

In 1996, voters approved a dedicated, perpetual millage to fund the establishment and operation of an independent district library, newly separate from the Ann Arbor public school system. Over the next twenty years, led by an elected Board of Trustees and supported by a talented staff of nearly 200 professionals, the Ann Arbor District Library (AADL) has become a treasured community resource.

The library operates out of five physical locations: the flagship building in downtown Ann Arbor, the Traverwood branch to the north, Westgate to the west, Malletts Creek to the southeast, and Pittsfield to the southwest. Through this deliberately placed constellation of facilities, patrons enjoy convenient access to all that the library offers.

A full compendium of these offerings would require space well beyond the bounds of this document. All the same, some notable highlights include:

- Traditional circulation materials such as books, DVDs, and other media – as well as unusual collections available for check-out including, but not limited to, musical instruments, art prints, home tools, and games;
- A diverse array of recurring programs and one-time events, often delivered in partnership with other public or private non-profit organizations;
- Spaces ranging from quiet study rooms for individuals and small groups, to community gatherings of up to 130 people, all available at low- or no-cost;
- Access to public computers and high-speed internet access;
- A rich suite of online resources such as the searchable Old News archive and Pulp, a compilation of information about arts experiences happening in and around Ann Arbor; and
- The Washtenaw Library for the Blind and Physically Disabled, which provides free access to alternative-format materials for those experiencing temporary or permanent visual/physical limitations, as well as other related support.

AADL is deservedly proud of its commitment to ongoing innovation. One of AADL's defining characteristics is the nimbleness with which the organization anticipates and

responds to evolving community needs and interests. From strategic early adoption of emerging technologies, to partnering with community organizations, and continuous evaluation of its service portfolio with an eye toward potential refinements, the library is committed to remaining relevant long into the future – all while staying faithful to the foundational reference and circulation services traditionally sought by patrons.

The library's resulting excellence has fostered appreciation at the local level: an EPIC-MRA survey conducted in February 2016 revealed that 94% of respondents hold a favorable opinion of the library. AADL has also received national recognition as well, as the only library in the state of Michigan to be awarded the Library Journal's "5-Star Library" status.

The following plan seeks to build on this foundation of excellence: aligning with the Ann Arbor District Library's vision, mission, and values; harmonizing innovation with tradition; and, ultimately, amplifying the library's impact in a way that is both ambitious and achievable.

Process Undertaken

As the existing strategic plan's term neared closure in 2015, the AADL Board of Trustees issued a competitive Request for Proposals that resulted in the engagement of Bridgeport Consulting beginning in December 2015. Over the following six months, Bridgeport consultants Kerry Sheldon and Griffin Reames:

1. Conducted **individual interviews** with each trustee to learn his/her particular interests and aspirations for the strategic plan;
2. Facilitated a **half-day retreat** with the Board of Trustees to develop a shared understanding of high-value topics to be explored;
3. Developed, deployed, and synthesized results from an **online survey distributed to all AADL staff** in the interest of broadening the field of suggestions and ideas that could inform the strategic plan's contents;
4. Synthesized **internal data** in order better to understand the demographics of AADL's existing cardholder population;

5. Compared cardholder demographics with **community-level demographic data** as published by the U.S. Census and Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG); and
6. Engaged a broad range of **stakeholders**, including current and prospective community partners, to brainstorm specific strategies and tactics for consideration by AADL Board of Trustees and staff in populating this plan.

Outcomes from the above activities provided a platform for discussion at the March, April, and May meetings of the Board of Trustees. Associated documentation has been compiled for reference purposes in the Appendices (published separately).

Ann Arbor District Library: Vision, Mission, and Values

The Ann Arbor District Library's (AADL's) vision, mission, and core values remain intact from the previous strategic plan, as follows:

Vision

The Ann Arbor District Library provides collections, programs, and leadership to promote the development of literate and informed citizens through open and equal access to cultural, intellectual, recreational, and information resources.

Mission

The existence of the Ann Arbor District Library assures public ownership of print collections, digital resources, and gathering spaces for the citizens of the library district. We are committed to sustaining the value of public library services for the greater Ann Arbor community through the use of traditional and innovative technologies.

Values

- Excellence in customer service
- Providing, supporting, and advocating access for all
- Acting with initiative, creativity, and flexibility
- Working together, with enthusiasm and optimism, to reach goals
- Responsible stewardship of resources

Strategic Initiatives and Goals

Initiative 1: Products and Services

1.1 Adjust offerings in order to better serve the senior population.

Persons over the age of 65 are currently well represented among AADL's cardholders (approximately 14% of active cardholders are age 65+). SEMCOG projects continued growth in this demographic through 2040; the library is cognizant of the need to adapt offerings on an iterative basis such that this population continues to be well served into the future.

1.2 Adjust offerings to augment our support of teen patrons.

Unaccompanied teens frequent the library when school is not in session. AADL welcomes these patrons, and plans to partner with existing local youth-serving agencies to further differentiate collections and programming that would appeal to this population.

1.3 Deepen, expand the portfolio of offerings supporting full equity and access across all cultures in our community.

AADL places high value on serving everyone in the community. Programming designed to complement broader cultural events such as Black History Month, or interactive exhibits highlighting a culturally specific art form, such as Taiwanese Glove Puppet Theater, have been well received. AADL's initial focus will be to consider program refinements reflective of traditions and interests of the Latino and Asian communities (both of which could certainly be segmented further), in response to the growth of these populations in Washtenaw County projected by SEMCOG.

1.4 Cultivate a more systemic partnership with Ann Arbor Public Schools.

While this goal is certainly not intended to preclude a strategy of deepening/expanding relationships with area charter and/or private schools, AADL seeks to develop an intentional approach to institutional partnership with the Ann Arbor Public School district, given the institutions' shared commitment to literacy development and lifelong learning.

1.5 Explore the guiding principles for AADL's approach to unusual collections.

The expansion of AADL's non-traditional collections has occurred rapidly over time. Given the enthusiastic patron response, AADL proposes to clarify and build a shared understanding of the organization's approach to this domain. Some principles that resonated with the Board of Trustees in their discussion include usability, community appetite, and finding the right balance between being responsive to expressed interests as well as anticipating emerging trends.

Initiative 2: Finances

2.1 Explore alternative revenue generation options.

Many libraries have established a companion foundation or endowment that is able to solicit charitable contributions that can support specific initiatives and/or overall operations. AADL has by no means determined to pursue this strategy; however, the Board of Trustees is interested in becoming educated about the possibilities, constraints, and potential benefits of doing so.

2.2 Continue to operate the library in a fiscally responsible manner.

One of the most important functions of the Board of Trustees is to ensure responsible stewardship of the public funds that provide for the library's operation. The library takes this responsibility seriously, and considers this goal a steadfast and necessary element of any strategic plan.

Initiative 3: Facilities

3.1 Prioritize and implement the long-term facilities maintenance plan.

The library has prepared a forecast of the capital outlay required to maintain each facility in the AADL system. Given finite resources, these expenditures must be carefully prioritized in the context of AADL's other strategic initiatives and operational demands.

3.2 Conduct a long-term study to evaluate the placement and attributes of current and future AADL facilities.

As a result of the Facilities Need Analysis completed in 1997, the physical presence of the Ann Arbor District Library system expanded significantly in the last decade. The Malletts Creek location opened in 2004; Pittsfield followed in 2006, and Traverwood in 2008. The Westgate location is presently being renovated and expanded, and will reopen in late summer 2016. Now, nearly

twenty years after the last Facilities Need Analysis, it is time once again to consider the physical presence of all AADL facilities in a holistic way that acknowledges their interconnectedness and ensures responsiveness to future development and demographic trends.

3.3 Reimagine the Ann Arbor District Library’s downtown presence.

AADL’s plans to replace the aging and inadequate downtown location with a new building halted when the bond issuance that would have funded the project was rejected by voters in 2012. Though undeniably part of the overall physical AADL system discussed in Goal 3.2, the downtown location deserves distinct treatment given the facility’s storied history, sheer physical size, and unique placement within the bustling commercial, residential, and recreational ecosystem of downtown Ann Arbor. The driving question behind this goal is: What role should the Ann Arbor District Library play in this ecosystem? What could AADL offer downtown that would be of optimal service to the community?

Initiative 4: Communications and Technology

4.1 Refresh AADL’s branding, integrated with a comprehensive communications strategy.

The Board of Trustees has expressed interest in revisiting AADL’s current branding in order to refresh the institution’s visual identity and increase awareness of the library in the community. This process is also intended to result in more substantive and systematized usage of various communication tools, especially electronic options, to connect with patrons.

4.2 Articulate a vision for technology investments that confirms AADL’s position as an early adopter, and ensures relevance and vibrancy over the long-term.

AADL has long been known for its pioneering approach to technology, having set an early goal to “be on the Internet before our patrons”. Given the rapid rate of change inherent to this domain, AADL seeks to define the organization’s philosophy with regard to keep pace with technology innovation in order to remain maximally relevant and useful to patrons.

4.3 Implement the new web presence.

The library recently engaged one of the worlds’ foremost experts, Peter Morville, to redesign the information architecture that drives internal library systems and

supports the public-facing website. This next step in this massive project is to implement the redesign, resulting in a completely updated, powerful, new website.

4.4 Identify opportunities to increase cross-channel interaction.

Increasingly, library patrons access information about AADL offerings through multiple platforms (i.e., print media, website, in-person) and devices (i.e., tablets, laptops, desktops, smartphones). Creating a rich and seamlessly interactive patron experience across these platforms is of fundamental importance.

Initiative 5: Organizational Development

5.1 Assess employee benefits structure for competitiveness.

SEMCOG projects that attracting and retaining talent in Southeast Michigan will be of key importance as the overall population ages and the growth of knowledge sector jobs. AADL undertakes a market study to assess employee compensation every three years, the most recent of which resulted in adjustments that will take effect this July. Employee benefits, especially with regard to the feasibility of expanding paid leave options, will be assessed next.

5.2 Provide meaningful opportunities for staff to implement the strategic plan.

The talent, creativity, and commitment of AADL staff are what power the day-to-day operations of the library. Staff's ability to shape and execute the strategies described within this plan will define the library's future success; providing meaningful avenues to leverage their work toward these shared goals is crucial.

5.3 Refine Board of Trustees' committee structure to enable a more open and inclusive communication.

There is consensus among AADL trustees that the existing committee structure unintentionally results in fragmented or incomplete information sharing, and limits the ability of the full Board to engage in open dialogue around important issues. Various methodologies – including the potential use of a consent agenda so as to enable the majority of the Board's meeting times to be devoted to discussion – will be explored in the interest of improving this dynamic.

5.4 Enhance professional development and learning opportunities for members of the Board of Trustees.

In the interest of Board cohesion and capacity-building, the AADL Board of Trustees would like to pursue opportunities to learn about library leading practices and emerging trends through conference/workshop attendance and/or exposure to the work of peer and aspirational libraries.