

INNOVATION TECHNOLOGY TASK FORCE STRATEGIC PLANNING RECOMMENDATIONS

AUGUST 19, 2015

INTRODUCTION

“People may go to the library looking mainly for information,” writes sociologist Robert D. Putnam, “but they find each other there.”¹ An unexpected focus for an *innovation technology* task force, but the Santa Monica Public Library is an unexpected kind of place. As the purveyor of our community culture, it is a vessel for Santa Monica to define and express itself and its aspirations.

Public libraries serve the entire public, from the already-connected to the not-yet-connected, to those who do not yet know what connection could mean for them. Inspired by the burgeoning creative economy--in technology, new media, and other ways for people to find one another--we write to inform and enrich the Santa Monica Public Library’s strategic planning process with policy, program, and process recommendations that, to paraphrase City Manager Rick Cole, might further open the door to learning and advancement and personal growth and community civic capital.²

¹ Robert Putnam, *Better Together: Restoring the American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 49.

² <http://www.santamonicanext.org/2015/07/courage-tenacity-and-imagination-an-interview-with-santa-monica-city-manager-rick-cole-part-ii/>

BACKGROUND

The purpose of the Innovation Technology Task Force is to provide insight, advice and support to the Library regarding: (1) the role of technology and other forms of innovation in 21st century library services; (2) the technology needs of Santa Monica residents and businesses -- especially students, adult learners and startup enterprise leaders -- that can be met through innovative Library Services and 3) social innovation and technology-related elements in the Library's strategic plan.

The Task Force identified and considered a series of overarching questions during the period April-June 2015, and in answering them has adopted, by consensus, the following set of recommendations. It is hoped that the Library's Strategic Planning Steering Committee will consider them and integrate them into a bold new vision and plan for Library Services.

In addition to attending community forums and hearing from key stakeholders (including members of the Library Board and the new Library Foundation of Santa Monica), Task Force members reviewed the results of the Library's 2015 Community Survey. Key technology-related findings informing these recommendations included:

- Potential Services: 50-60% of respondents rated “collaborative working spaces” and “maker spaces” as extremely important or important. Such services would mirror the working and learning patterns of many technology users, at all ages and across professions.
- Respondents under 50 and/or under 35, respondents who are infrequent Library visitors, and respondents who do not have a library card all gave much higher ratings for potential technology-related services, including “collaborative working spaces,” “maker spaces,” and “hackathons.” Even though the rank ordering remained similar to that by respondents overall, there was much more enthusiasm among these groups for such services, including “smart boards” and audio visual production facilities.
- Demography: nearly all respondents to the Survey were existing Library card holders, and a majority of respondents were over 50. Since the Task Force's charge has been to identify ways to expand the Library's stakeholder base, the recommendations below are intended to broaden the Library's appeal beyond the core survey respondent group.

Overarching questions considered by the Task Force included:

- What are the community's aspirations and core issues?
- How can we help to re-imagine the Library's future?
- How can the Library become more relevant to young professionals?

- How can the Library meet its users where they are, beyond existing built and online facilities - how do we extend the Library outward?
- Who is coming to the Library? Who is being connected at the Library and who can we additionally connect? Who can we bring here? How can we attract new users?
- What is the impact of the public’s perception as to who is working out of the Library and what is the work that they are doing?
- What are the unique needs of various age groups and how can the Library simultaneously address those needs?
- How can the Library harness resources from its surrounding community’s vibrant and diverse creative economy?
- How do we leverage innovation and technology in Library services to address community members’ needs? What does success look like in a year? Three years?
- How do we ultimately connect technology, innovation, community and learning?

In addition to these questions, we explored **human-centered design** as a methodology, design and planning tool that engages a cross-section of product and service users to imagine and improve upon new possibilities for the library. “Design thinking,” as IDEO’s Tim Brown has observed, “draws from the designer’s toolkit to integrate the needs of people, the possibilities of technology, and the requirements for business success.”³

³ Tim Brown, President & CEO at IDEO, <http://www.ideo.com/about/>

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

1. As part of its commitment to community wellbeing (*Strategic Focus Area 2*), the Library is the hub of a socioeconomically and culturally connected community, bridging generations, addressing digital divides, and linking diverse languages of learning, from text to code.

As a “third space” dedicated to accessibility and service to all, the Library is uniquely situated to address equity issues related to technology and access to city services. It is a natural agency for bridging the digital divide and improving digital inclusion. In so doing, the Library can serve as a catalyst for grassroots social innovation by bringing together a cross-sector of groups to create social good and build different forms of community capital.

2. The Library’s physical and virtual technological infrastructure (*Strategic Focus Area 3*) meets Santa Monicans where they are, helps them achieve their goals, and shows them new possibilities they hadn’t yet imagined.

The rapid pace, development, and adoption of technology, places a special demand on the public library. More than just books and banks of computers, libraries are still places where individuals gather to explore, imagine, interact, and produce. To stay current, while also maintaining a tradition that dates back to Benjamin Franklin (whose own library lent out scientific instruments), the Library must not only provide content and access to expertise; it must also enable its users to develop and create their own content, products and services, while having the access, the means and the understanding of ever-shifting content distribution channels.

3. The Library is a center for lifelong, experiential and technology-driven learning helping all Santa Monicans to flourish, especially people who live, work, and/or study here (*Strategic Focus Area 1*).

The Library has always served as the “people’s university,” particularly for lifelong learners, older residents, and career pivoters. In a time when education has become increasingly expensive, public libraries provide information and educational opportunities free for all people, regardless of their socioeconomic status. Libraries also have a long history of serving the needs of students, local artists, entrepreneurs and businesses. The Santa Monica Public Library can offer access to current technologies

(primarily cost-prohibitive software), mentors and teachers, and thus continue to be a source of learning and growth, especially for small local businesses, entrepreneurs and career pivoters.

4. As an information & networking clearinghouse and gateway for Silicon Beach, the Library has the infrastructure and capacity to create and sustain relationships (*Strategic Focus Area 4*) with external stakeholders interested in developing technology, connectivity, and pathways for a local, community-driven workforce, while also bridging the digital divide.

At their best, libraries are hubs not only for residents but also for businesses and community organizations. Citywide scale makes possible the democratization of access to technology, information resources, and shared capacity (such as videoconferencing, meeting space, and other tools). The Library can contribute to Santa Monica’s emerging culture of civic philanthropy by endorsing partnerships with the Library Foundation of Santa Monica, the Santa Monica-Malibu Education Foundation, the SMC Foundation, the Santa Monica Arts Foundation, the Santa Monica Parks Foundation, and other civic-minded groups.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Our recommendations carry policy implications, which cut across our recommendations. If recommended by the Strategic Planning Committee and Library leadership, these policies would be reviewed and considered for approval by the Library Board or, in the case of fees and fines and budget requests, by the Santa Monica City Council.

1. In order to ensure the ongoing capacity of the Library to meet community needs and take advantage of growth opportunities, **seek (1) additional capital funding and (2) biennial operational funding** to bring the Library technology infrastructure up to date and thereafter to maintain currency with developing technology equipment and practices. This includes digital audio/video display and broadcast/streaming capacity in the Martin Luther King, Jr., Auditorium, community and multipurpose rooms, and in co-working/maker/digital media spaces, as well as adequate fiber to support these purposes.
2. In order to ensure that Library constituents have equitable access to the Library and its facilities to advance our purposes, **review existing fee structures** to the extent that they may inhibit or privilege such access.
 - a) Reconsider library card fees, especially for non-residents, to ensure equitable accessibility, especially for full-time students who go to school in Santa Monica (preschool-college) and who are employees, partners, or contractors for Santa Monica businesses.
 - b) Manage usage of Library study rooms as *de facto* free workplaces (e.g., college examination tutoring) and consider implementing fee/permit structure similar to those for commercial fitness trainers in Santa Monica parks. A model policy and basis for an ordinance could provide as follows: “If you train, instruct, or lead a tutorial or class for compensation - financial or in exchange for goods or services - in Santa Monica's libraries, you are required to obtain a permit and follow the City's rules in addition to obtaining a business license and police permit as applicable.”
 - c) Consider enabling Library facility rentals for private purposes consistent with the Library's mission and values, irrespective of the legal status of the renting entity, and consider allowing renting entity to charge attendees under appropriate conditions.
3. To increase the appeal and competitiveness of Library facilities for community events and tech meetups, **consider relaxing alcohol restrictions** to enable beer and wine to be served under appropriate conditions (such as a book club with wine, or the Library's 125th Anniversary Gala).

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