Engaging, Enlightening, and Energizing Evansville
(E^4)

Honoring the Past – Embracing the Future

A Strategic Plan
for the
Eager Free Public Library
Evansville, WI
2014 – 2020

Appreciation is extended to the following people for their contributions, hard work and dedication in creating this plan for the Eager Free Public Library:

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Last, but certainly not least, appreciation is due to the hundreds of Evansville area residents who participated in the plan through their attendance at focus groups and/or by completing the web survey that was conducted as part of the planning process.

INTRODUCTION

Opportunities for lifelong learning are essential to the development of a prosperous economy and a thriving community.
The public library has been an important part of American life for well over a century. Public libraries have served as a "door to learning" for generations of children, as the "people's university" for knowledge seekers of all ages, and as a dependable source of access to information for thousands of individuals seeking to better themselves and their communities. Libraries have been the places that people could turn to for answers to their questions, for a good book to read or a good movie to watch in their leisure time, and in recent years, for a connection to a world of online resources. Libraries have served as centers of community life where people of the community come together for informative programs or simply to meet their neighbors and friends.

The Eager Free Public Library serves as a powerful symbol of the importance the people of the Evansville area place on knowledge and on quality of life.
Public library service began in Evansville in 1899 and the doors of the Eager Free Public Library at West Main and First Streets have been open since 1908. The Library has endured two World Wars and conflicts in Korea, Viet Nam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. The Library was a beacon of hope during the Great Depression and has been a reliable source of critical information through multiple recessions. Generations of Evansville's children have been introduced to the joy of reading at the Eager Free Public Library. The Library's place in Evansville's history is secure. The plan presented on the following pages honors that history while, at the same time, turns its attention to the future.

Libraries must embrace change while preserving fundamental print-based services that will continue to be valued well into the future.
The Eager Free Public Library, like most public libraries, is facing significant challenges in 2014 and beyond. Tax dollars are hard to come by at a time when record numbers of individuals are turning to public libraries for access to job-seeking resources, affordable recreational opportunities, and answers related to important life decisions. The Internet and the proliferation of laptop computers, smart phones, tablets, and e-readers are changing the way a new generation of readers, listeners, and viewers acquire information. While some of the mechanisms used to acquire information are changing, the public library service model of acquiring once for the benefit of many is more vital than ever.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

This Strategic Plan is the result of many months of hard work by a 12-member Strategic Planning Committee comprised of citizen representatives, Library Board Members, and Library staff members. The Committee met on five occasions throughout the process including a three-hour planning retreat.

The Committee considered a significant amount of information that came directly from area residents. A total of 203 individuals responded to a web-based survey distributed to Library users and other community residents. Seven focus group sessions attracted another 40 individuals. Maps plotting usage patterns, demographic data, and a host of library input and output statistics were also analyzed as part of the process.

Library Services

The Eager Free Library offers a wide array of services to the public. However, because Evansville's library, like most other libraries, has finite resources, this plan emphasizes a few services that have the greatest potential for having a lasting impact on the community.

While the Library will continue to offer a wide array of services, it will concentrate its efforts in achieving excellence in the following areas, chosen from those described in the Public Library Association's planning guide entitled Strategic Planning for Results. The Library will offer these services from a facility that provides a safe and welcoming environment and where all the people of the community can meet and interact with others or sit quietly and read and study. Over the next five years, the Library will increasingly become a center of community life and will direct the majority of its resources to the following high-priority services:

Create Young Readers: Children from birth to age five will have programs and services designed to ensure that they will enter school ready to learn to read, write, and listen.

Stimulate Imagination & Satisfy Curiosity: Residents of all ages will find materials, electronic resources, and programs that excite their imaginations and provide pleasurable reading, viewing, and listening experiences. They will also have the resources they need to explore topics of personal interest and continue to learn throughout their lives.

Portal to the Digital World: Residents will know that the Library is a portal to the digital world with no unnecessary restrictions or fees that ensures that everyone can take advantage of the ever-growing resources and services available online.

THE PLAN

Honoring the Past - Embracing the Future

The Eager Free Public Library has a long, proud history of service to the community. This plan honors the past while, at the same time, it focuses on the future. The plan recognizes that the success of the Library and the success of the community are intertwined. The Library's vision statement reflects this connection. The Library's mission statement reflects its unique contribution to community life.

Vision
Engaging, Enlightening, and Energizing Evansville (E⁴)

Mission
The Eager Free Public Library opens doors for curious minds by encouraging literacy, inspiring learning, and connecting people.

Values
The Eager Free Public Library is guided by the following values in everything it does:

The plan that follows is built around four strategic themes:
1. Maintain the existing customer base of people who use print and other "traditional" library resources
2. Cultivate a new generation of Library users
3. Build the Library's technological capacity/capabilities
4. Foster connections with community organizations and individuals

Strategic Theme 1: Maintain the existing customer base of people who use print and other "traditional" library resources

Goal: Residents of all ages in the Evansville area will continue to have free and convenient access to a wide range of high-quality print library resources, including "traditional" services and programs that contribute to the quality of life in the community and enable people to succeed at work, at school, and in their personal lives.

Rationale: The Eager Free Public Library is widely respected in the community. The public recognizes many of the Library's strengths, such as its collection, extensive children's programming, and outstanding customer service. While the Library must be innovative and must develop new, technology-based mechanisms for delivering service, interest in and the use of traditional print resources remains high. Because the taxpayers place a high value on these traditional resources and services, an ongoing effort must be made to preserve and enhance them.

Potential Actions:

- Work with the City to ensure that adequate funding is available for basic resources and library materials
- Continue to offer collections of high-quality print material that meet the needs and demands of the public
- Enhance virtual and in-person readers' advisory services
- Ensure that any plans for expansion carefully consider workflow/efficiency issues
- Increase the staff's capacity to serve the public through training, the provision of quality work tools and technology, and by streamlining processes
- Expand and enhance the homelike quality of reading areas in the Library to accommodate the public's desire to spend more time during each visit
- Improve the "browsability" of the Library's collections through user-friendly/intuitive arrangement of shelving, enhanced displays, and improved signage
- Work with the Arrowhead Library System to improve functionality/user-friendliness of RockCat, the online catalog

Strategic Theme 2: Cultivate a new generation of Library users

Goal: Residents of all ages in the Evansville area will be offered relevant resources, services, and programs delivered in multiple ways to save a new generation of technologically savvy library users time and money, contributing to their personal success and quality of life.

Rationale: In addition to print materials, the Library already provides a wide variety of physical materials in digital formats including audio books on CDs and movies on DVDs. Through its participation in the Arrowhead Library System and the Wisconsin Public Library Consortium, the Library is offering downloadable audio books and e-books for use on e-readers and other handheld devices. The Library affords access to a wide variety of online information ranging from general databases and genealogical resources (e.g., Reference USA, Heritage Quest, and Ancestry.com) to learning and employment related resources (e.g., Mango Languages and Learning Express). The Library is also actively using social media to connect directly to current and potential library users. The Library must continue to remain abreast of technological innovations and must implement new and emerging information delivery methods if it is going to remain relevant to a new generation of Library users. The Library must also position itself to be convenient to use for all residents including teens and a growing number of commuters who live in the Evansville area but work in other communities.

Potential Actions:

- Continue to expand connections with teens and the general public through greater/more effective use of social media
- Explore the "maker space" concept by using the existing meeting room area for more "hands-on" teen programs and consider the inclusion of a maker space in any expansion
- Identify ways to increase expenditures on technology and digital resources while maintaining the quality of print collections
- Review job descriptions and increase the expectation that all staff will acquire appropriate technological competencies
- Develop a comprehensive program designed to provide all staff members with the enhanced technological knowledge and skills they need to serve the public
- Consider altering the Library's hours of operation to accommodate the commuter population
- Increase the awareness of digital resources among users of traditional print library materials and increase their comfort with using these resources
- Expand promotion of the availability of downloadable resources as the quantity and range of offerings increases
- Enhance efforts to acquaint customers with the process of downloading library resources to their e-readers, tablets, and other handheld devices

- Explore the installation of "book lockers" and other devices that increase access to library services after normal business hours in the expanded Library

Strategic Theme 3: Build the Library's technological capacity/capabilities

Goal: The people and businesses of the Evansville area will utilize the Library as a primary access point and portal to digital information that enables them to connect to global resources and markets.

Rationale: Access to the Internet has become a necessity in a digital world with a global economy. A connection to the online world has become essential to apply for many jobs, to file many governmental forms and to pursue an education in many fields. The Eager Free Public Library provides primary access to the Internet for a significant number of people. Furthermore, as more individuals begin to acquire a larger percentage of information in digital formats, the Library will play an increasingly important role as an aggregator of demand and supplier of high-quality digital information through licensing agreements with publishers and with suppliers of costly information databases. By providing connections to the online world and by offering access to quality fee-based digital resources at no direct cost to the end user, the Eager Free Public Library can provide valuable services to a growing segment of the population that may visit the Library's website as much or more than they visit the physical facility.

Potential Actions:

- Enhance the Library's web presence and content available through the Library's website
- Review job descriptions and increase the expectation that all staff will acquire appropriate technological competencies
- Develop a comprehensive program designed to provide all staff members with the enhanced technological knowledge and skills they need to serve the public
- Increase ongoing operational support for digital services and supplement funding for advanced technology-based services with non-tax revenues and through strategic partnerships
- Expand and enhance spaces for using other technologies (e.g., smartboard/ smart TV, digitization equipment, etc.).
- Enhance library facilities to become more user-friendly for the users of laptops, tablets, e-readers, smart phones, and other handheld devices
- Offer frequent opportunities for the public to be trained to use library resources on e-readers and other handheld devices
- Work with the Arrowhead Library system to expand bandwidth available for internal Library functions and for Library customers
- Engage young professionals and "digital natives" who have interacted with digital technology from an early age to increase their awareness of digital offerings and services
- Adopt best practices related to technology and piggyback on the development of digital applications and services developed by other libraries

Strategic Theme 4: Foster connections with community organizations and individuals

Goal: The people of the Evansville area will be served by a library that enriches the community through partnerships and collaboration with community organizations and individuals.

Rationale: The Library is one of many important institutions in the community. Enhanced cooperation and collaboration between and among these organizations has the potential for maximizing the overall positive impact on the people of the community. The range of services the Library offers and the fact that it serves people of all ages makes it a highly desirable partner. Expanding existing partnerships with organizations and individuals along with building and maintaining new partnerships benefits the community and optimizes finite financial resources. The potential for partnering and collaboration is particularly great as it applies to programming activities for children, teens and adults.

> **Potential Actions**
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> - Develop a marketing plan that enhances public awareness of the Library's services and activities
> - Enhance the number and range of programs available for people of all ages through partnerships, collaboration, and by utilizing the knowledge and skill of individuals in the community
> - Enhance meeting room facilities and the overall customer experience in the Library
> - Identify exemplary libraries that engage their communities to a high degree in programming activities and adopt best practices
> - Continue to pursue grants and gifts to supplement public funds available for programming purposes
> - Install appropriate technologies and more comfortable seating in the existing meeting rooms and plan additional well-equipped meeting spaces in the expanded facility
> - Enhance physical facilities to make them more accessible, comfortable and inviting for use by non-profit organizations and other community groups
> - Develop an enhanced volunteer program designed to recruit and train individuals who can support Library staff in their programming efforts