

# ACTION GUIDE

## for Re-Envisioning Your Public Library

Based on the report *Rising to the Challenge: Re-Envisioning Public Libraries*



THE ASPEN INSTITUTE  
*Communications and Society Program*





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We also acknowledge and thank Sue Cardillo and Lynn McMahon, principals at Yearick-Millea and our dynamic duo of strategic communications consultants, for their expert guidance and relentless efforts to bring this action guide from concept through pilot and to final release. We thank their Pittsburgh-based associates at Miller Creative Group for working with us to produce a lively and engaging resource for library professionals.

Most importantly, this action guide would not be complete without the significant contributions made by the 23 public libraries that tested an earlier version of the guide during a pilot phase in fall of 2015. These library directors, their staff, trustees and community partners who participated in pilot activities, have provided excellent feedback to improve and strengthen the final content and activities in this version. We thank them for their generous contributions of time and expertise. The 23 pilot libraries are (in order of size of population served):

**Red Hook Public Library**, Red Hook, New York (pop. 1,900)  
**Columbus Public Library**, Columbus, Wisconsin (pop. 5,000)  
**Middlebury Public Library**, Middlebury, Connecticut (pop. 7,600)  
**Pine River Library**, Bayfield, Colorado (pop. 8,700)  
**Somerset County Public Library**, Princess Anne, Maryland (pop. 25,900)  
**Fletcher Free Library**, Burlington, Vermont (pop. 42,200)  
**Wallingford Public Library**, Wallingford, Connecticut (pop. 45,000)  
**Skokie Public Library**, Skokie, Illinois (pop. 64,800)  
**Sutter County Library**, Yuba City, California (pop. 95,800)  
**New Braunfels Public Library**, New Braunfels, Texas (pop. 66,400)  
**Lynchburg Public Library**, Lynchburg, Virginia (pop. 75,600)  
**Santa Monica Public Library**, Santa Monica, California (pop. 89,800)  
**Wicomico County Public Library**, Salisbury, Maryland (pop. 101,500)  
**Anythink Libraries**, Thornton, Colorado (pop. 118,800)  
**Warren County Public Library**, Bowling Green, Kentucky (pop. 120,500)  
**The Ferguson Library**, Stamford, Connecticut (pop. 122,600)  
**Cedar Rapids Public Library**, Cedar Rapids, Iowa (pop. 126,300)  
**Clinton Macomb Public Library**, Clinton Township, Michigan (pop. 170,000)  
**Harford County Public Library**, Bel Air, Maryland (pop. 249,200)  
**Cleveland Public Library**, Cleveland, Ohio (pop. 390,100)  
**Southern Adirondack Library System**, Saratoga Springs, New York. SALS is a consortium of 34 libraries in New York serving the counties of Hamilton (pop. 4,700), Saratoga (pop. 224,900), Warren (pop. 65,000) and Washington (pop. 62,400)  
**Sacramento Public Library**, Sacramento, California (pop. 466,500)  
**Salt Lake County Library Services**, West Jordan, Utah (pop. 1,100,000)

Any errors or omissions in this action guide are the sole responsibility of the Aspen Institute Dialogue on Public Libraries project director.



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# BACKGROUND

**In their forward to *Rising to the Challenge: Re-Envisioning Public Libraries*, Deborah L. Jacobs and Charles M. Firestone\* provided the following overview to the *Aspen Institute Dialogue on Public Libraries*.**

*The Aspen Institute Communications and Society Program, in partnership with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, created the **Aspen Institute Dialogue on Public Libraries** to help advance the work that public libraries are doing to address community challenges and to support the transformation of communities and their public libraries in the digital age. The Dialogue on Public Libraries is a multi-stakeholder forum that brings together library professionals, policymakers, technology experts, philanthropists, educators and civic leaders to explore, develop and champion new ways of thinking about public libraries.*

*The Dialogue's work is informed by a select 35-member working group that met twice in the project's first year to examine the evolving societal role of the public library, and to shape and advance a perspective that re-envision U.S. public libraries for the future.*

The result was a report, ***Rising to the Challenge: Re-Envisioning Public Libraries***, issued in October 2014. Since that time, the Aspen Institute has committed time and resources to ensure that the report is used in communities across the country and at state and national levels to promote the transformation and sustainability of public libraries.

The following are a few examples of how the report has since been used as the basis of discussion among library staffs, boards of trustees, policymakers and funders. It was used:

- to initiate a discussion on the future of public libraries on a statewide level – in Connecticut;
- as part of the strategic planning process for the Topeka and Shawnee County (KS) Public Library and the Santa Monica (CA) Public Library;
- in community forums convened by the Brewster Ladies Library in Massachusetts as part of planning for the renovation of its building; and
- as a resource for the City of Winter Park (Florida) Library Facility Task Force to design and develop a new library-civic center facility subsequently approved by city commissioners.

The report serves as a framework for dialogue among the library's many audiences to re-envision the public library as a center of learning, creativity and innovation of the 21st century.

\*Deborah L. Jacobs is the Director of the Global Libraries Program at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Charles M. Firestone is the Executive Director of the Communications and Society Program at The Aspen Institute.

# INTRODUCTION

To help library and community leaders use the report, *Rising to the Challenge: Re-Envisioning Public Libraries*, the Aspen Institute created the *Action Guide for Re-Envisioning your Public Library*, a set of resources for convening a community dialogue and helping communities take action to re-envision their own public library.

This compendium of resources has been designed as an action guide with the hope that library and community leaders across the country will use it to bring to life a bold new vision for public libraries. It is also expected that the web site, *LibraryVision.org*, will become a platform through which individuals can share additional resources they have created along with stories of their experiences. This will enable the development of a national and, perhaps, a global network of individuals, communities and organizations to emerge for the purpose of ensuring the long-term sustainability of public libraries.

This action guide contains worksheets to be used:

- for evaluating the current level of activity and support for the library and to determine goals and action steps
- as a guide for planning and convening a community dialogue
- for talking points to use in community outreach
- for links to other resources

A 10-week pilot of the action guide was completed in Fall 2015 among 23 libraries across the country. Feedback from the pilot was helpful in improving the content of sections and in enhancing the activities throughout the action guide. With ongoing feedback from users, the action guide will continue to be improved upon and new editions will be issued.

The action guide is complemented and enhanced by the *LibraryVision.org* website that serves as an online resource center. Through the website, library leaders and important community stakeholders can join the *LibraryVision* community and access short videos, podcasts, PowerPoint Slides, stories and case studies as related by leaders who have used the report, ***Rising to the Challenge: Re-Envisioning Public Libraries***.



# INSTRUCTIONS

**Each section of the action guide is designed to be completed sequentially, culminating in the convening of a community dialogue\*.**

The sequential order of the sections allows content from each section to build on the next. As you move through the action guide, some questions may feel duplicative. We suggest that you refer back to earlier ACTivities and carry answers and information forward when you encounter a question or topic that you feel you may have addressed previously.

**\*Community dialogue – Your community dialogue can begin with a single event that brings community representatives together to discuss community needs and sets an agenda for future events and conversations, or as a series of multiple events to address specific populations or topics. The purpose of convening a community dialogue, whether initially one event or multiple, is to maintain an ongoing conversation with the community and its leaders.**

## Getting it Done – For Large and Small Libraries

Our pilot participants, representing both large and small libraries, used the action guide in a variety of ways. There is not one right way. The right way is what works best for you and your library.

- **Managers** – weekly or bi-weekly, managers come together to discuss and complete each section.

- **Staff** – conduct one introduction meeting with all staff to discuss the action guide, and provide staff with one section to complete on their own either with a colleague, small group of peers or independently. Bring the staff together bi-weekly to review and discuss the section and receive copies of the next section.
- **Trustees** – If you're inclined, the following sections could be completed with your trustees:
  - Engaging Community Leaders
  - SOAR Assessment
  - Strategies for Success
- **Community Volunteers** – small and rural libraries may want to pull together a group of community volunteers to work through the action guide as a group at scheduled intervals.
- **Libraries Together** – small and rural libraries can team up with neighboring libraries to work together and share thoughts, comments and ideas in completing the action guide.

## Timing

The action guide should be completed in three to four months and culminate in the convening of a community dialogue within two months of completing the action guide.

## Working with the PDF Document

The action guide is a form-enabled PDF. This means that you can enter your responses directly into the PDF document. Please **remember to save your responses** each time you use the file.

*A page for notes has been added to the end of each section. If you find you need more room for answers in any of the sections, please use the Notes page.*



# 1

PEOPLE



**Recommended reading:**

*Rising to the Challenge: Re-Envisioning Public Libraries, pages 10-20.*

## THE LIBRARY AS PEOPLE

The library as people reflects the shift away from building collections to building human capital, relationships and knowledge networks in the community.

People are at the center of the library's mission to inspire and cultivate learning, advance knowledge and nurture and strengthen communities. While there are thousands of stories in the public library, the ones that matter most come with the people who use the library.

The public library comes alive when it is teeming with people from all walks of life:

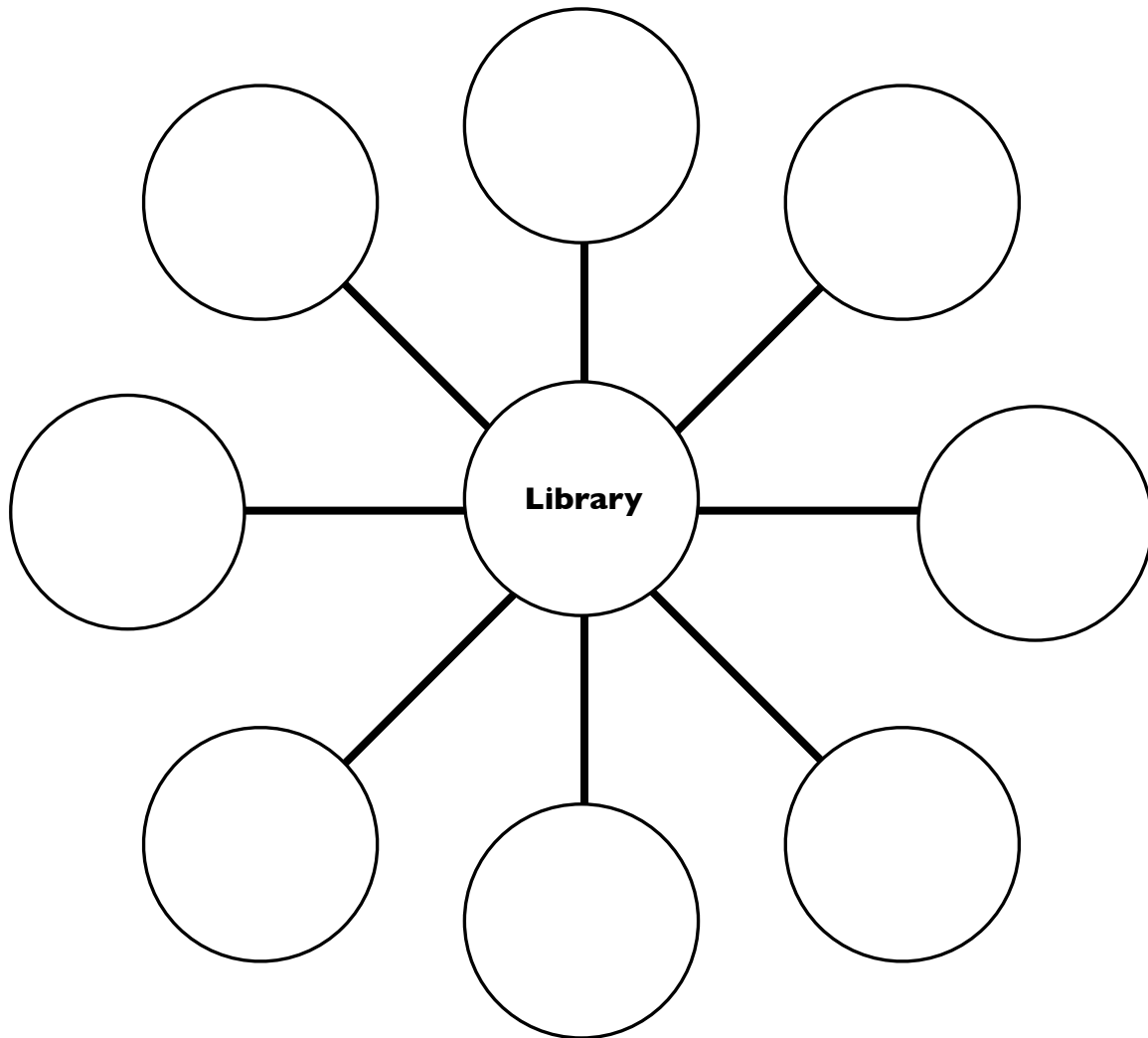
- **FAMILIES** reading with their children in colorful, comfortable chairs
- **TEENS** learning how to write code for a new video game in a noisy learning lab
- **STUDENTS** meeting in a library classroom for group discussion as part of an online high school course
- **JOB SEEKERS** working on résumés in career centers, with guidance from a business librarian
- **ENTREPRENEURS** preparing presentations in co-working spaces, using the library-provided Wi-Fi and creating new products in maker spaces
- **IMMIGRANTS** learning English in classes and improving their job-seeking skills with the help of community mentors
- **RETIREES** using new online tools to create digital scrapbooks for their grandchildren
- **AUTHORS** publishing books on new library publishing platforms



As the library's roles change and expand, library staff have refined and broadened their skills to meet new needs and define the library's continuing value to the community. *They serve many roles, as coaches, mentors, facilitators and teachers* – more than simply as sources of information. Measuring outcomes is more important than measuring outputs. An intelligent community, not large circulation numbers, is the primary library goal.

**ACTivity 1**

What are some of the audiences at your library? Complete the audience map below.



Are there other audiences not represented above? Please list them below:

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## ACTivity 2

What **role** does your library play with each audience?

What are the **expectations** that the community and these various audiences have for the library?

In the activity on page 11, list each audience group noted on the previous activity and then identify the expectations that each audience has for the library in the community, whether the library is fully fulfilling those expectations or not? What does the audience want or need from the library? How do you know this?

After identifying expectations, identify the actual role that the library plays vis-à-vis each audience.

Finally, note the outcomes in the community resulting from the library's engagement with each audience.

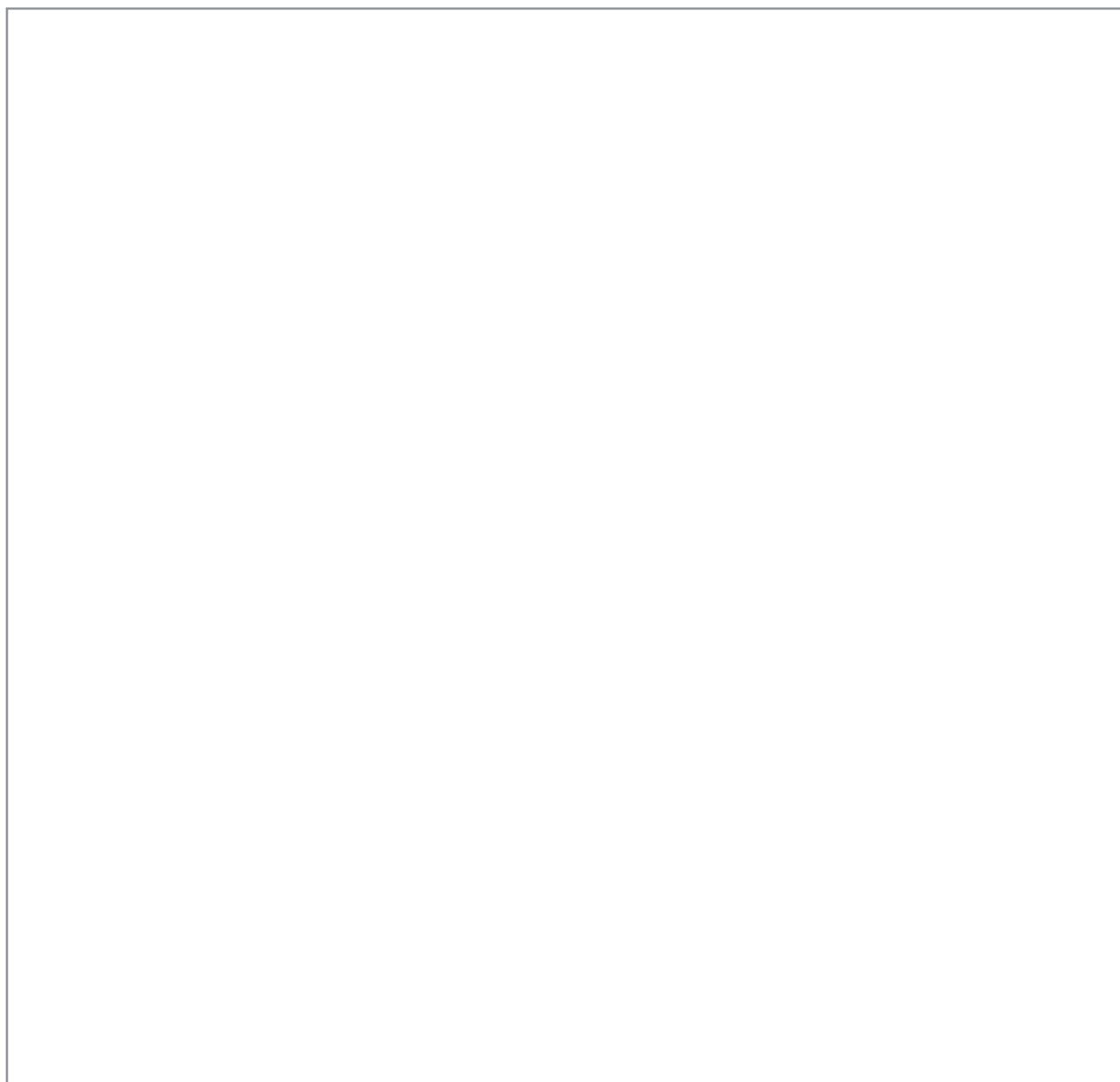


AUDIENCE	EXPECTATION	ROLE	OUTCOME
1. _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
2. _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
3. _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
4. _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
5. _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
6. _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
7. _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
8. _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____

Return to the hub and spoke map on page 9. This model visualizes the library at the center of a series of individual relationships. However, a community is a network of many interconnected relationships.

Consider that the library is one node on the network of community relationships, and not necessarily at the center. How would you redesign the diagram to show the relationships that different audiences in the community have to one another and the connections they have to the library? Create a series of smaller diagrams or maps to show the relationships that your library has with different networks within the community, using the information from the expectations, role and outcomes exercise above to reimagine the relationships that may exist (i.e., learning networks, health networks, immigrants and new citizens, families, business and economic development in the community, etc.)

Draw maps here.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for drawing maps or diagrams. It occupies the central portion of the page below the text.



# 2 PLACE



**Recommended reading:**

*Rising to the Challenge: Re-Envisioning Public Libraries, pages 10-20.*

## THE LIBRARY AS PLACE

In an increasingly virtual world, physical library places are **community assets**. They:

- **ESTABLISH PERSONAL CONNECTIONS** that help define community needs and interests
- **PROVIDE AN ANCHOR** for economic development and neighborhood revitalization
- **STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY IDENTITY** in ways that yield significant return on investment, including drawing people together for diverse purposes
- **PROVIDE A SAFE AND TRUSTED LOCATION** for community services such as health clinics, emergency response centers, small business incubators, workforce development centers and immigrant resource centers
- **CREATE CONNECTING PLACES** in new locations that draw people together—shopping malls, big box stores, airports and mobile buses

The reduction in physical materials, greater customer mobility and the desire for more collaboration and creation are changing the nature of the public library's physical space.

The physical library must undergo a transition that embraces the openness and flexibility needed to thrive in a world of constant change. Central to this flexibility is creating spaces that can adapt to the changing operational models of libraries.

The library as it exists within virtual space must be considered as a wholly independent but highly integrated experience; that is, the library's virtual presence must be as engaging as its physical space and fully serve the library's mission built around equitable access, learning and civic development. Platforms must be conceived that address not only the operational and practical benefits of libraries but also benefits that are emotional and highly social. The public library should define what makes a great online public space.



***The library is first and foremost a place... a place that promotes development in society. It is the family room of a community. That's the vision, that's the future.***

—Akhtar Badshah

## ACTivity

Facilitate a discussion around the following questions:

### PHYSICAL SPACE

What does your library do to make it a great *public* place?

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In what ways is your library transforming from a space for basic transactions (checking out books) to a space that provides richer experiences (inspiration learning, collaborating and performing)?

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Where in your library do you have places/opportunities for nurturing emotional and social interactions and development?

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If there were no barriers, what five things would you do to make your library even better?

1. 

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2. 

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3. 

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4. 

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5. 

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Select one of the five aspiration goals above and identify one that is a priority you could work on over the next six to eight months.

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What do you need to accomplish your goal? Who can you partner with inside or outside of the library?

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**ONLINE SPACE**

What are the key features that create a great online community? (Consider online groups you participate in professionally and personally.)

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How is your library's online space currently used?

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If there were no barriers, what five things would you do to make it even better?

1. 

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2. 

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3. 

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4. 

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5. 

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Pick one of the five aspiration goals above and identify one that is a priority you could work on over the next six to eight months.

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What do you need to accomplish your goal? Who can you partner with inside or outside of the library?

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# 3

## PLATFORM





# THE LIBRARY AS PLATFORM

The transformations of the digital age enable individuals and communities to create their own learning and knowledge. To that end, libraries become platforms—bases on which individuals and communities create services, data and tools that benefit the community. The library as community learning platform is the innovative proposition of the public library in the digital age.

A great library platform is a “third place”—an interactive entity that can facilitate many people operating individually or in groups. The library platform supports the learning needs and goals of the community.

As a platform, the library promotes development in the community and society by identifying and filling gaps in community services including early-childhood education, lifelong learning, technology literacy and e-government. The library as platform makes the library a participatory enterprise.

The library as platform creates community dialogue that makes way for new expertise and creates social knowledge.

The library as platform radically reshapes the library’s daily activities, shifting away from the old model of organizing and “lending” the world’s knowledge toward a new vision of the library as a central hub for learning and community connections.

The library’s new activities include:

- **Bringing** analytical understanding to disorganized and abundant streams of information
- **Connecting** people seeking information to the resources, people or organizations that can provide it
- **Synthesizing, analyzing, storing** and **curating** information for those who want to consult material in the future



## Recommended reading:

*Rising to the Challenge: Re-Envisioning Public Libraries*, pages 10-20.

David Weinberger, “Library as Platform,” [http://lj.libraryjournal.com/2012/09/future-of-libraries/by-david-weinberger/#\\_](http://lj.libraryjournal.com/2012/09/future-of-libraries/by-david-weinberger/#_)

Andy Havens, “From Community to technology ... and back again,” <http://www.oclc.org/en-US/publications/nextspace/articles/issue20/fromcommunitytotechnologyandbackagain.html>

R. David Lankes, “Library as Platform: Unlocking the Potential of Our Communities,” <http://quartz.syr.edu/blog/?p=6710>

- **Facilitating** discovery and serendipitous encounters with information
- **Helping** people solve local problems
- **Recruiting** volunteers and specialists to participate in platform activities, especially by helping meet the needs of those querying the system
- **Performing** information concierge services and access to government services that are not at times delivered well by existing government agencies

As available content grows exponentially, the library’s curator capacity becomes more important and more challenging.

## ACTivity



### TIP

For small and rural libraries with limited staff, consider how to manage these platform-related tasks through partnerships or consortia, in which you may already participate. For example, IMLS partnerships with many federal agencies have created resources on workforce development and jobs, early learning, immigration and citizenship, financial literacy, etc. Likewise, state library agencies often have resources, professional development activities and regional networks that you might tap or may already tap to use the power of networks to extend the reach and offerings of your library platform, which includes the library's collection but also people (including specialists from the community), partnerships, technology and the other resources that comprise the library as platform.

Facilitate a discussion around the following questions:

### Looking at your own library, how are you:

1. Bringing new analytical understanding to disorganized and abundant streams of information for your community?  
The library can be a critical asset to help the community make sense of a world of information abundance, and to help individuals without strong information literacy skills learn how to find high quality and credible information—the right information for their needs. How does your library help the community to manage the firehose of information available from many sources?

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2. Connecting people seeking information to the resources, people or organizations that can provide it?

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3. Curating information for those who want to consult material in the future and making it visible to the community?

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4. Facilitating discovery and serendipitous encounters with information and other people, whether at the library or outside the library's walls?

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5. Helping people solve local problems?

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6. Recruiting volunteers and specialists to participate in platform activities?

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7. Engaging other members of the community to assist you with the functions noted in 1-6 above—analyzing, connecting, curating, facilitating, discovery and problem solving—whether they are helping inside or outside of the library's walls?

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8. Hosting events that are both physical and virtual—where interaction can begin in one space and continue in the other?

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# 4

## JOBS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



**Recommended reading:**

*Rising to the Challenge: Re-Envisioning Public Libraries, page 27.*

## JOBS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

While libraries increasingly are seen as part of the education infrastructure that serves children and schools, **their role in the workforce infrastructure is newer and less well understood.**

This is a time of enormous opportunity for public libraries to reach out to local and state governments, labor departments, economic development agencies and others to ask how the library can use its platform to create a 21st-century workforce that will retain current businesses and attract new ones to the community.

Here are five examples of libraries supporting workforce development:

- 1 In **Omaha, Nebraska**, the Omaha Public Library initiated new partnerships with the business community that build on the library's community engagement and learning work. The library has worked with regional software companies and technology businesses looking for workers with software and design skills to establish workforce development initiatives that train area residents in these much-needed skills. The participating businesses helped the library rethink its technology offerings to support workforce needs.

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- 2 In **Memphis, Tennessee**, the Memphis Public Library's JobLINC mobile career center helps job hunters find employment opportunities and helps employers find new employees. The 38-foot bus delivers job and career resources to job seekers at convenient locations in the community. It comes equipped with computers, email access, information resources and staff to assist with job listings, job applications, resume writing, interviewing and improving other skills.

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- 3 In **New York City**, the Department of Small Business Services established one of its Workforce 1 career centers at the Brooklyn Central Library. The center prepares and connects city residents to job opportunities in the city, with emphasis on both job skills needed by local employers and soft skills such as interviewing that are equally important to securing a job.

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- 4 In **Kings Mountain, North Carolina**, Mauney Memorial Library offers a Downtown Kings Mountain Business Success Project. In this multi-year project the public library is providing training and other assistance to microenterprise businesses so that they are successful in the 21st century marketplace. Local officials, including the mayor, are involved in and very supportive of the project.

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- 5 In **Mocksville, North Carolina**, the Davie County Public Library has an arrangement with the Piedmont Triad Regional Council (PTRC) to have two Workforce Development reps on site two days weekly to work with job seekers on job searches, applications, resume writing, and entering data in the NC Works website. The PTRC was shutting down the local Workforce office in Davie County and job seekers would have had to drive into Winston-Salem (30 minutes away) had no other arrangement been made available. The library provides space where PTRC staff can work with job seekers. Through staff assistance at the library, several people have found jobs. Mocksville is a small town and while the numbers of clients served are not huge, the service is greatly appreciated.

## ACTivity



**Small or rural libraries with a limited staff – consider talking to community members, partners, policy makers or collaborating with neighboring libraries.**

Facilitate a discussion around the following questions:

What means do you have in place to identify the workforce needs of your community? (Examples: community college, Chamber of Commerce, county or state agencies, Small Business Administration)

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What is your library doing to support workforce and economic development? If your community's unemployment rate is low, how do you provide assistance in finding the right job or developing a career?

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What relationships do you have with local businesses and corporations?

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How can your library become more involved in supporting workforce development in your community?

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What organizations, associations or businesses can you align with?

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Based on the discussion you've had related to the above questions, what are three things you can accomplish in the next six months to one year in this area?

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2. 

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3. 

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# 5

## THE LIBRARY AS CIVIC RESOURCE



**Recommended reading:**

*Rising to the Challenge: Re-Envisioning Public Libraries, pages 29-31.*

## THE LIBRARY AS CIVIC RESOURCE

The public library is a place for the community to experiment and collaborate, to gather and engage, and to explore and confront important community issues such as homelessness, immigration, economic development, public health and environmental sustainability. With its deep knowledge and relationships in the community, its physical presence and its platform, the public library is playing an important role in sustaining the civic health of the community. Libraries are carrying out this important civic role in the 21st century by:

- **SUPPORTING GOVERNMENT SERVICE DELIVERY** including public health education, immigration and citizenship services, government jobs information, disaster response and recovery information
- **ENGAGING CITIZENS IN THE GOVERNING PROCESS**, both through face-to-face participation and use of the library platform to strengthen citizen-citizen and citizen-government partnerships
- **CREATING NEW OPPORTUNITIES** to bring people of different backgrounds together to solve problems and build stronger communities. Civic engagement in the digital age takes on new dimensions with exciting opportunities for virtual engagement



## Ferguson Municipal Public Library Stands with its Community

The Ferguson Municipal Public Library has been hailed as a model for all libraries because of the way the small library with only one full-time employee responded to the unfolding crisis in Ferguson, Missouri in the late summer and fall of 2014. The community was on fire, literally and figuratively, following the shooting death of Michael Brown, an African-American teenager who was unarmed at the time of the shooting by a white police officer. Civil unrest, pockets of rioting and a militarized response to some of this by law enforcement combined to create a tense and unpredictable atmosphere. Many businesses closed their doors and town officials delayed the start of the new school year.

Library Director Scott Bonner and his part-time staff and volunteers saw a community in need and kept the library open, providing a welcoming and safe place for the community to gather. Library staff used social media tools like Instagram and Twitter to let the community know that the library was open for business.



Ferguson Library  
@fergusonlibrary



Following

We are here for all of our residents. If you want to come, get water, read, check email, we are here and happy to serve our community!  
[#fergmo](#) [#FergusonLibrary](#) [#Ferguson](#)



Teachers set up classrooms at the library where students could engage in activities and lessons to be productive until the start of the new school year. The library made statements of support for the community, including a sign outside the library doors that said “Stay Strong Ferguson” and “We are Family.” Bonner tweeted:



Ferguson Library  
@fergusonlibrary



Following

We're here for YOU #Ferguson!  
Big thanks to Ferguson Optical for the street sign idea.



In naming the Ferguson Municipal Public Library its 2015 Library of the Year, *Library Journal* lauded the decision of Bonner, then in his fifth week on the job, to keep the library open. Writing for *Library Journal*, John N. Berry, III said:

*“It would have been easier to close the library as many expected. Instead, Bonner had the courage and commitment to the community to keep FMPL open and to partner with teachers and community agencies to provide education, information, and emotional sustenance to the citizenry, including its children. As the story unfolded and the library stayed open, FMPL became an icon of constructive engagement and Bonner an unofficial ambassador of this important aspect of the library’s mission in a community in turmoil.”*



# THE LIBRARY AS TRUSTED COMMUNITY LEADER

Other libraries are taking a proactive stance on engaging the community to discuss and address big issues of concern to the community by convening and facilitating public discussions using the people, place and platform assets of the library. The American Library Association's recent partnership with The Harwood Institute for Public Innovation provides a method for library staff to develop skills to serve as effective community conveners and leverage the public library's position as one of the most trusted institutions in the community. The resources created for libraries are available on the ALA website, including a step by step guide to [turning outward to your community](#), as well as resources available on the Harwood Institute's website, including the [Harwood in a Half Hour resource](#).

There are other approaches to libraries convening community dialogues. In Stamford, Connecticut another Ferguson Library is showing the way by actively convening a number of community conversations to explore the

difficult issue of race relations. In January 2015, the Ferguson Library partnered with the Interfaith Council of Southwestern Connecticut to convene "Moving Beyond Racism," a program that brought a diverse group of people to the library to discuss race relations in Stamford and the surrounding area. Participants watched a video and then formed into groups with people they did not know to talk about race. State representatives and Stamford's mayor were invited and joined the conversation.

The Ferguson Library has continued to work with partners to address the community's need for a trusted venue for addressing the issue of race relations. In October 2015, the library hosted a roundtable discussion sponsored by the [Urban League of Southern Connecticut](#). The roundtable engaged Stamford youth to discuss race relations and identify strategies to encourage positive change in the community.





**ACT**ivity

There are many ways for the library to serve as a civic resource, from basic government service provision through active engagement and leadership to create a sense of belonging in the community and help the community to identify and achieve its aspirations. You can think of this as akin to the iconic pyramid of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, with basic needs (physical needs, safety) at the bottom, intermediate needs (belonging and esteem) in the middle, and self-actualization (reaching one’s aspirations) at the top of the pyramid.

Facilitate a discussion around the following questions:

How is your library a civic resource in your community? At what stage of a hierarchy of civic needs does your library operate?

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In what ways do library leadership and staff get out of the library and into the community to learn about the civic needs of the community and its residents?

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What level would you like your library to occupy in the community? Does anyone else already do this in the community? What help and support do you need to get to the desired level and be effective (consider whether your library needs to develop or strengthen people, place or platform assets to fulfill this role)?

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Who can work with you?

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What do you do to communicate your role as a civic resource?

- Do community members know the library...
  - is a welcoming environment for experimentation and collaboration?
  - provides opportunities for gathering?
  - provides the resources for exploring and addressing community issues?

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If you are not communicating about your role as a civic resource, what can you do to communicate more effectively?  
What communication channels can you use – e.g., library newsletter, eblast, social media, news release, etc.?

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# 6

## THE LIBRARY AS LITERACY CHAMPION







### Recommended reading:

*Rising to the Challenge: Re-Envisioning Public Libraries, pages 27-28.*

**The 21st-century library is the champion of the literacies needed to navigate information abundance, create knowledge, bolster economic opportunity and make democracy dynamic.**

In the digital age, content is widely available in diverse formats outside traditional publications, requiring new skills to succeed in this information-rich environment. Building on its historic commitment to literacy, the library is uniquely positioned to provide access, skills, context and trusted platforms for sharing. Examples of new digital literacies include the ability to:

- **INTERACT WITH TECHNOLOGY DEVICES AND CONTENT** at very different levels than ever before
- **FILTER MASSIVE AMOUNTS OF INFORMATION** and translate it into knowledge in a highly complex environment
- **SELECT THE RIGHT TOOLS** for knowledge creation and management



## Howard County (Maryland) Library System

### HITECH: THE ROAD TO A STEM CAREER

The Howard County Library System's HiTech digital media lab is designed to open doors and opportunities to the region's teens. HiTech delivers cutting-edge science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) education using hands-on technology projects, experiential learning and peer-to-peer communications. Envisioned as a launching point for the STEM career pipeline, HiTech focuses on producing the next generation of scientists, mathematicians and engineers to meet the needs of the region's highly skilled job market. The curriculum includes both self-paced and structured learning opportunities divided into four modules that

emphasize interaction, improvisation, invention and instruction. The HiTech Academy component focuses on teens who are interested in pursuing higher education in science, technology, engineering or math by providing instruction, site visits to STEM work environments and attendance at college-sponsored STEM sites. Since HiTech's launch, more than 2,000 teens have participated in a wide range of classes, created a mobile game that was released in 2013 and has been downloaded 5,000 times around the world, and worked on the library's Choose Civility e-book featuring their own stories and photos.

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## Houston Public Library

### HEALTHY L.I.F.E.

Healthy L.I.F.E. is the Houston Public Library's (HPL) health-based literacy initiative designed to empower and equip families with information, resources and tools needed for healthy living. With 66 percent of adults and 34 percent of youth in the Houston area overweight or obese and one in five Harris County adults lacking basic literacy skills, the library leveraged its status as a trusted learning resource to tackle a significant community health education challenge through a family-learning model. Healthy L.I.F.E. offers regularly scheduled events to help parents and children learn together about healthy lifestyles, stress-free living, school success and healthy eating while also gaining access to free community resources that support better health. The events are held at branches that serve low-income populations, have

positive relationships with schools and community groups, and experience high-demand for and interest in family-centered programming. Since its creation, more than 50 agencies have worked with the library to contribute information, resources and services to more than 3,100 families including 50,000 pounds of fresh food distributed to needy families by the Houston Food Bank, along with 3,000 nutrition and fitness books and DVDs. Among participating families surveyed, 80 percent have committed to changing their lifestyles and improving their own healthy living behaviors.

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## New Haven Public Library

### ASK-A-LAWYER CLINICS

The New Haven Free Public Library is among a growing number of public libraries in Connecticut that are supporting expanded legal literacy in the community by offering free Ask-A-Lawyer clinics at the library. Ask-A-Lawyer clinics are scheduled one evening a month from 5:30-7:30 PM. They provide members of the community with general legal information, access to an attorney for a free 15 minute consultation, and referrals if needed to the Lawyer Referral Service for further assistance from a social service agency or a \$15 referral to a lawyer. The program is part of a broad initiative by the Connecticut Judicial Branch Access to Justice Commission and its Workgroup on Libraries & Access to Justice, which includes the Connecticut

State Library's Division of Library Development, the Judicial Branch and the Connecticut Network for Legal Aid. This partnership is tapping public libraries to provide the people, places and resources to support individuals who need access to information and other resources for self-representation in courts. Public libraries are more accessible than court centers which typically close by 5:00 PM, and they are staffed with skilled librarians who can help library patrons find information and get in contact with legal aid representatives and judicial centers to understand what services and resources are available for them. The Division of Library Development is running training programs to providing legal aid literacy for librarians across the state.

**ACTivity**

Facilitate a discussion around the following questions:

In what ways is your library a literacy champion?

- adult literacy
- English as a second language
- early literacy
- civic
- health or medical
- digital
- cultural
- legal
- environmental
- STEM
- financial
- visual
- other \_\_\_\_\_

Which of the above are the areas of greatest need in your community? How will you go about identifying these areas?

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Which of the literacies that you listed is a strength for your library? Identify one. How did you develop that strength?

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How are you using that strength in your community now? How can you enhance its use in the future?

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Share one or two ways to further develop an area of need for your community where your library also needs to develop strength. For example, are there opportunities to form partnerships in the community that would lead to positive outcomes?

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How can you take steps and identify partners who could help your organization develop that literacy so that it will lead to positive outcomes?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_

What does your state library do to support the various literacy areas that you listed? Are you connected to that effort?

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# 7

## SOAR ASSESSMENT





# SOAR ASSESSMENT

## STRENGTHS, OPPORTUNITIES, ASPIRATIONS, RESULTS

The SOAR assessment is an effective, easy-to-use tool to build a strengths-based strategy for community development. It helps groups and communities to focus on what they are doing well, what areas or capacities can be improved upon and what is most compelling to stakeholders. Its focus aligns well with the Dialogue's emphasis on the future and community aspirations. This tool evolved in the practice of Appreciative Inquiry as applied to strategic planning in organizations.

Appreciative Inquiry is an approach to change that begins with careful identification of strengths to enable stakeholders to pursue their dreams and visions of what might be. It is a process of collaborative inquiry to clarify the strengths, positive experiences, achievements and best qualities of a group, an organization, a situation, a relationship or an individual. It is a means to create change based upon the premise that we can effectively move forward if we know what has worked.

The implementation of the SOAR assessment engages all levels and functions of an organization. It is not designed to be a top-down assessment tool.

The role of the facilitator during the SOAR assessment is to probe by asking leading questions and, when necessary, to provide some direction and assistance with answers. When conducting a SOAR analysis, the basic questions to be answered are:

1. What are your greatest **strengths**?
2. What are your best **opportunities**?
3. What is your preferred **future**?
4. What are the **measurable results** that will tell you that you have achieved that vision of the future?



**TIP**

**Small or rural libraries with a limited staff – consider talking to community members, partners, policy makers or collaborating with neighboring libraries.**

### SOAR is best defined in this way:

**Strengths:** What does the library do very well now, what works, what are your assets and capabilities? What are your greatest strengths?

**Opportunities:** Where in the current context are there opportunities for the library to make a difference, to contribute, to innovate? What are your best opportunities?

**Aspirations:** What are your hopes and dreams for the future? What do you want to be known for? What is your preferred future?

**Results:** What do you most want to accomplish? What will success look like?



**TIP**

**For more information on aspirations facilitation, please refer to the [Harwood in a ½ Hour Aspirations Facilitator's Guide](#).**

## ACTivity

Form small groups of five to seven individuals. Invite the groups to address each of the four topics in turn. Ask each group to identify one member to act as the recorder. The use of a flip chart and markers is very helpful for this. Allow 30-45 minutes for each of the four discussions. After each small group discussion, invite each group to give a brief report of the highlights.

### **Some questions to ask when assessing the STRENGTHS of your organization:**

What is it that makes you proud of your organization? How does that reflect your greatest STRENGTH(S)?

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Of what achievement in the last two years are you most proud?

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What are your greatest assets?

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What do your STRENGTHS indicate about your capabilities?

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Prompt participants to share stories that demonstrate library strengths or areas of excellence. One member of each group will report on the major themes that emerged during their discussions.

### **Some questions to ask when assessing the OPPORTUNITIES of your organization:**

What OPPORTUNITIES should you focus your efforts on? Identify the top three from your list.

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How can you best meet the needs of your audiences?

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What trends could work in your favor? What is possible?

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What new skills or resources do you need to move forward?

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**Some questions to ask when assessing the ASPIRATIONS of your organization:**

If you could wave a magic wand to accomplish three things to strengthen the health and vitality of the community, what would they be?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

It is three-to-five years from now and the library and community have a thriving, productive relationship. What does this look like? What three steps were critical to making this happen?

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**Three Steps**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

What kind of a community do you want? What are the most important attributes? Essential components?

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What kind of change is needed to make that happen?

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What role could the library play in making that change?

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What are the core factors that give life to your community?

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**Some questions to ask when assessing the RESULTS of your organization:**

What are some key RESULTS that have already been achieved?

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How do you measure success now? How will you measure success in the future?

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In what areas does your library need to improve based upon the RESULTS?

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# 8

## STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS



**Recommended reading:**

*Rising to the Challenge: Re-Envisioning Public Libraries*, pages 33-47.

## STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

In the report, *Rising to the Challenge: Re-Envisioning Public Libraries*, the following four strategies were identified as opportunities for continuing library transformation:

- 1. Align library services in support of community goals.**
- 2. Provide access to content in all formats.**
- 3. Ensure long-term sustainability of public libraries.**
- 4. Cultivate leadership.**

The ACTivities for this section have been broken down into three parts. You can choose to address all of them at one time or address them in three separate sessions.

As you work through the Action Guide for Re-Envisioning Your Public Library, assessing how your library is performing in the areas of supporting community goals, providing access, ensuring long-term sustainability and cultivating leadership will help you better prepare for hosting your library's own community dialogue.





## ACTivity 2

### PROVIDE ACCESS TO CONTENT IN ALL FORMATS

As the public library shifts from a repository for materials to a platform for learning and participation, its ability to provide access to vast amounts of content in all formats is vital. Libraries face two immediate major challenges in providing access to content in all forms:

- Being able to procure and share e-books and other digital content on the same basis as physical versions
- Having high capacity, easily scalable broadband technologies in every library that deliver and help to create content

Stakeholders must work together to find solutions to these challenges that meet the community's needs and work for content creators, publishers and the public.

**Provide access to content in all formats** – What steps has your library taken to meet the changing technological and digital needs of your community?

What strategies do you have in place to balance the provision of resources in a variety of formats, including formats that meet the diverse needs of different audiences and populations in your community?

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Is your library's current broadband capacity sufficient to meet patron demands for broadband and wireless connectivity at peak times? What plans are in place to address increasing demand?

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What capacity and resources does your library have to plan and implement new technologies as the information environment and content industries continue to evolve? Are there partners in the community or in state or national networks who can assist with the skills, expertise or capacity that your library may need to build, and who are they?

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## ACTivity 3

### ENSURE LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Public libraries need to transform their service model to meet the demands of the knowledge society while securing a sustainable funding base for the future. Achieving this means libraries need to:

- Identify reliable revenue resources for both daily operations and long-term planning and investment
- Explore alternative governance structures and business models that maximize efficient and sustainable library operations and customer service
- Become more skilled at measuring outcomes rather than counting activities
- Balance the local and national library value proposition to consider economies of scale in a networked world without compromising local control
- Ensure long-term sustainability of public libraries

What form of consistent funding do you have in place for operational costs (short-term needs)?

What do you see as opportunities for additional funds for new initiatives?

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How do you build a more sustainable future on the strengths and priorities that are in place? What new partnerships, consortia or collaborations could you develop to bring in new resources or leverage existing resources?

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## ACTivity 4

### CULTIVATE LEADERSHIP

Leadership is needed to build communities and public libraries that thrive and succeed together. Every community needs a vision and a strategic plan, with input from all stakeholder groups. Key steps include:

- improving communications with community leaders
- developing community champions
- strengthening intersections with diverse communities
- reaching out to and engaging with young-professional organizations and demonstrating the collective impact of partners working together

#### Cultivate leadership

In what ways are you cultivating leadership within your library (new skills and competencies needed)? Are you addressing the development of staff at all levels and in different capacities?

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In what ways are you cultivating leaders in the community to support your library? How might community leaders who are engaged as library partners, including those identified in the sustainability section above, be enlisted to help the library to overcome existing barriers to sustainability?

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# 9

## ACTION STEPS FOR LIBRARY LEADERS



**Recommended reading:**

*Rising to the Challenge: Re-Envisioning Public Libraries*, page 50.

## ACTION STEPS FOR LIBRARY LEADERS

The following action steps are not listed in any particular order of importance. The action steps are meant to serve as a set of **starting points** for moving forward.

### 15 Action Steps for Library Leaders

- 1) Define the scope of the library's programs, services and offerings around community priorities, recognizing that this process may lead to choices and trade-offs.
- 2) Collaborate with government agencies at the local, state and federal levels around shared objectives. This includes partnerships with schools to drive learning and educational opportunities throughout the community.
- 3) Partner with local businesses, chambers of commerce and community colleges to provide access to curricula and resources, to technology and certification programs and to job search resources to maintain a highly skilled yet highly flexible workforce.
- 4) Engage the community in planning and decision-making, and seek a seat at tables where important policy issues are discussed and decisions made.
- 5) Connect resources from other agencies or libraries to the library platform rather than reinventing the wheel or always going solo.
- 6) Develop partnerships and collaborations with other libraries and knowledge networks that can contribute to efficiencies, using the opportunities provided by digital technologies.
- 7) Support the concept of a national digital platform to share collections nationally while continuing to maintain a local presence and focus; participate in content-sharing networks and platforms.
- 8) Deploy existing resources in new ways.
- 9) Collaborate in negotiations with publishers on reasonably priced and easily accessible access to e-content and develop win-win solutions.
- 10) Provide mobile devices for in-library, in-community and at-home use.
- 11) Measure library outcomes and impacts to better demonstrate the library's value to the community and communicate these outcomes to key partners and policy makers.
- 12) Communicate the library's story of impact directly to the public, partners, stakeholders and policy makers. Include the new vision built on the library's people, place and platform assets.
- 13) Develop a richer online library experience and stronger competencies in using digital and social media to demonstrate the library's role in the digital transformation.
- 14) Change long-held rules and operating procedures that impede the development of the library's spaces and platform.
- 15) Take proactive and sustained steps to brand the library as a platform for community learning and development.

## ACTivity

Review each of the above Action Steps for Library Leaders and identify the top five that offer the most promise to your community.

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Select one or two of the above that are important and feasible for implementation in the short term.

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

How will you begin the process of implementation? What is your first step?

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What support would you need and where would you get it?

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What resources would you need and where would you get them?

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What would you need in order to move on with the other three action steps identified?

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# 10

## ENGAGING COMMUNITY LEADERS





**Recommended reading:**

*Rising to the Challenge: Re-Envisioning Public Libraries, pages 49-52.*

# ENGAGING COMMUNITY LEADERS

A key step to convening a public dialogue for your library is to identify community leaders who you want to invite to participate in your discussions, either as guests, presenters or panelists.

When thinking of who these individuals might be, consider who you'd want as a programming or advocacy partner, community sounding board, donor, etc.

**Careful thought should be given to who the leaders are for each of the primary stakeholder audiences that your library serves.**



## ACTivity

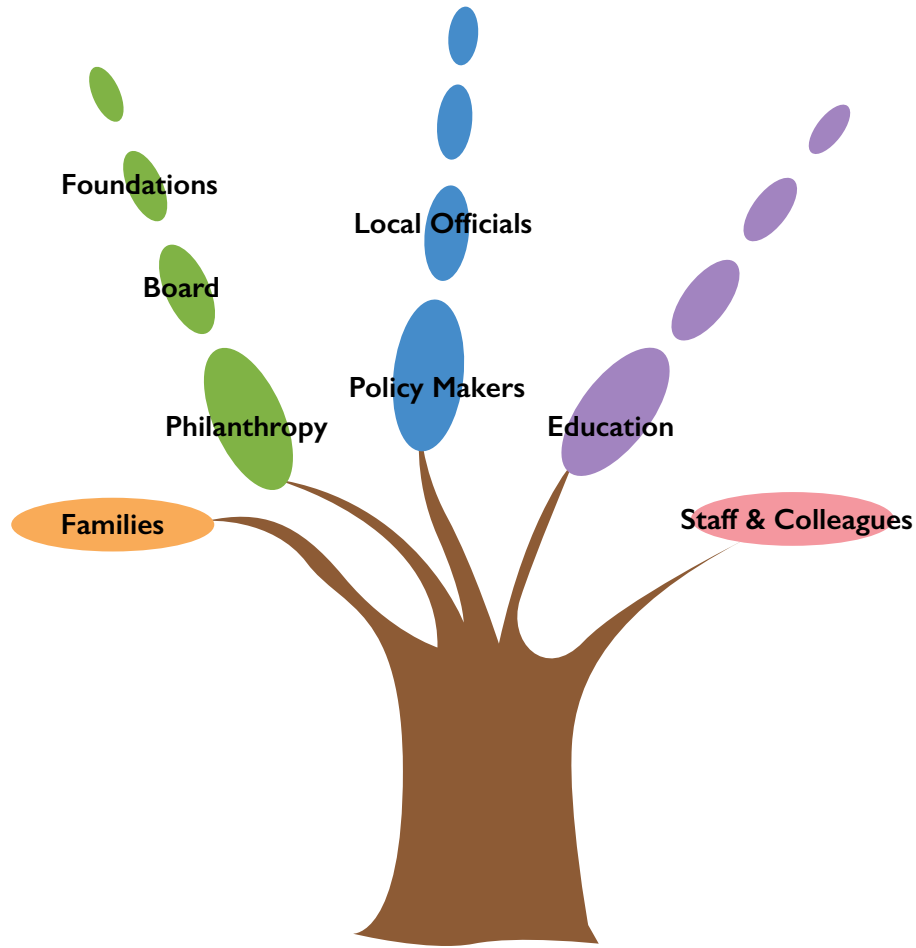
Here are criteria to keep in mind when identifying community leaders from each audience. These are individuals who:

1. **are known in the community** – they may be leaders in their neighborhoods, political figures, business heads and are names that many would recognize and respect.
2. **are likely to be committed to this work** – whether because of their position or their library support, these are individuals who will share thoughts and ideas to help keep the library forward-thinking.
3. **are key influencers** – these are individuals who, by virtue of the position they hold or for other reasons, have resources, relationships or networks to move work forward.
4. **cut across boundary sectors** – these are individuals who break through barriers rather than resist them.
5. **add a dimension of diversity** – in the broadest sense of diversity – race, age, religion, job, area of focus or expertise.

**Consider the five criteria above. Who are the 10 leaders that you would engage immediately?**

Name	Affiliation
1. _____	_____
2. _____	_____
3. _____	_____
4. _____	_____
5. _____	_____
6. _____	_____
7. _____	_____
8. _____	_____
9. _____	_____
10. _____	_____

The following tree diagram identifies several stakeholder groups that would apply to all libraries.



When engaging community leaders, careful consideration should be paid to making sure there is representation from each of the above audiences. Be mindful about the influence that individuals have in the community and how their participation or attendance may be beneficial to the library.

When reviewing the tree diagram, what other primary audiences for your library would you add?

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When you examine your tree and the audiences you added, where do you see your greatest relationships? Why are they the strongest?

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Now, when you think about the 10 leaders you identified above, are there others you would add after thinking about these audiences? Who will you add and why?

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## ACTivity

**What are additional sub-categories that you would add to fill in more ‘leaves’ in each category?**

A sub-category are the groups, partnerships and affiliations within each primary audience.

**Example: Local Officials—Mayor, Chief Administrative Officer, Council or Comission, Finance Board, etc.**

It may be helpful to form small groups and have each discuss sub-categories for assigned primary audiences and to identify individuals affiliated with each.

	<b>Sub-category</b>	<b>Contact</b>
Children & Families	_____ _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____ _____
Philanthropy	_____ _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____ _____
Policymakers	_____ _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____ _____
Education	_____ _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____ _____
Staff & Colleagues	_____ _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____ _____
Other	_____ _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____ _____



## ACTivity

Now that you've thought about which community members to engage, take note as you navigate around your own community. What are you noticing about the people and institutions who are active in your community? What activities are happening quietly but making a big difference? Are leaders from these organizations on your list of top 10?

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Arrange face-to-face meetings with your top 10 leaders and ask them about their business or organization. What can the library do to serve them better? Document the discussion from your meetings. What have you learned? What changes will you make as a result?

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# 11

## CONVENING YOUR PUBLIC DIALOGUE



# CONVENING YOUR PUBLIC DIALOGUE

This action guide is designed to be a tool for library leaders to prepare for and initiate an ongoing dialogue with the community and its leaders around the community's priorities. The goal is re-envisioning the library's role in addressing the community's needs, priorities and aspirations. The starting point is your initial public dialogue, but this should not be considered a one-time event. Rather, the dialogue event that you schedule following the completion of this Action Guide should be seen as the catalyst for developing a new relationship and ongoing conversation with your community and its leaders. The goal of this conversation is to look forward and enable the community and library together to develop strategies and implement actions for deploying the library's key assets in new ways to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow.



This section is flexible to enable the planning committee and facilitators to adapt it to the needs of the individual community.

The following content is designed to aid library leaders in convening a public dialogue:

- Responsibilities of an Effective Facilitator
- Guidelines for an Effective Discussion
- A Sample Agenda for a Discussion
- Appendix

## **Responsibilities of an Effective Facilitator**

The facilitators of public dialogues have an important role and contribution to make in helping community members to understand and work with the report. The following is a list of suggested responsibilities to help facilitators be most effective in this role:

- Welcome all participants
- Present a set of guidelines for the discussion and test for agreement with the participants
- Open the discussion with a general, broad question
- Be prepared with additional, more specific questions
- Encourage everyone to participate
- Ensure balanced participation
- Remain neutral on the content of the discussion
- Practice active listening
- Encourage the expression of different points of view
- Help participants to understand each other and their different perspectives
- Summarize periodically
- Record key points
- Manage time
- Invite the 'reflective observers' to comment
- Provide concluding remarks and thank participants

## ACTivity

### GUIDELINES FOR FACILITATION

#### Prepare for the Session

There are four (4) key steps in preparing for the session:

1. Read the report, *Rising to the Challenge: Re-Envisioning Public Libraries*
2. Review the **Sample Agenda for a Discussion**. Decide what, if any, adaptations you want to make for your session. Prepare an outline for your session.
3. Select the 3 or 4 key questions you will pose in the discussion. Determine if you will need additional resources (opening remarks or short opening video) to provide context for the participants, who may need additional information or knowledge to frame specific issues for the discussion.
4. Review the **Responsibilities of an Effective Facilitator**. Remember especially the importance of remaining neutral in the discussion.

#### Facilitate the Discussion

Open the discussion with a brief review of the purpose of the session. Be sure everyone has a copy of the report or a summary document taken from the report. Review a brief set of ground rules or guidelines to follow in the discussion. Tell the group how you plan to proceed. Provide opening remarks or opening video for context.

Post the questions you have selected from the list provided on the next page or those you have developed. Allow sufficient time for participants to comment on a question before you proceed to the next question.

Record the key comments and ideas on a flipchart.

Use the last 10 minutes to review key points in the discussion, invite final comments, do a brief assessment of the session, inform the group about next steps and thank them for their participation.

### A Sample Agenda for the Discussion

#### Introduce the discussion

1. Welcome participants and introduce yourself.
2. If appropriate and time allows, ask participants to introduce themselves.
3. Review the purpose of the discussion session.
4. Present the Guidelines for Discussion, and check for agreement among participants. (See Appendix for suggestion list.)
5. Explain the format, and provide any other background information.

#### Invite participants to spend a few minutes in quiet reflection before discussion starts

To help the participants prepare for their participation, ask them to do one of the following activities:

- Review the four-page summary.
- Review one of the lists of Action Steps.
- Reflect for a few moments on *why I am here* or *the question I most want to discuss is ...*

#### Begin the discussion

Open with a general, broad-based question. For example, first explore the strengths and needs of the community so that you can lay the groundwork about how the library can be more involved in meeting community goals. (See sample facilitation questions on next page.)

#### Facilitate the discussion

- Invite participants to offer their points of view and idea.
- Keep the discussion going. Be alert to who is ready to speak and call on them.
- Probe for deeper thinking.
- Record key points or ideas. A flipchart is an effective tool for this.
- Watch the time. Be alert to the progress of the discussion and the time remaining.

### Sample Facilitation Questions

1. What kind of a community do we want? What are the most important attributes? Essential components?
2. What are the core factors that give life to this community?
3. When you first came to this community what were your most positive and powerful impressions?
4. As you reflect upon the many shifts happening in the world today, describe one that gives you hope. How might this community respond to this one big hope?
5. What exists now that will enable our community to realize its dreams and aspirations?
6. It is 3-5 years from now and the Library and community have a thriving, productive relationship. What does this look like? What 3 steps were critical to making this happen?

### Suggested Guidelines for the Discussion

One important tool for facilitators is a set of ground rules or guidelines for the group to follow. When the discussion time is short, it can be especially helpful for the facilitator to present a set of proposed rules or guidelines for the group to consider. Usually the question, “Will everyone commit to following these rules?” elicits general agreement from participants.

When developing your proposed set of guidelines, consider the group whose discussion you are facilitating. The following is an example of guidelines you might implement:

- Take turns to speak and to listen.
- Listen to understand.
- Expect and respect differences.
- Suspend judgment about the ideas and opinions expressed.
- Be authentic – say what you mean.
- Think before you speak.
- Be clear and succinct in the expression of your ideas.

### End the Discussion

- When about 15 minutes remain, pause and ask if there is anything else anyone wants to say before you move to close and adjournment.
- Summarize key points.
- Summarize what the next steps will be and when you will contact participants to share a summary report or further activities. It is important to let your participants know that this is the beginning of a process of engagement and action, not a one-time event.
- Thank attendees for their participation.
- Set expectations for ongoing dialogue and action.
- Consider formation of an advisory group or steering committee to continue working on development of action items, implementation and future dialogue events.
- Bring the summary of the event to regional or statewide library meetings or meetings of municipal leagues and associations to share experiences and encourage other communities to hold their own events. Use this opportunity to nurture a community of practice around these conversations and the promise of libraries engaging with civic leaders to transform communities.
- Consider outreach to key stakeholders like community foundations or other philanthropic partners to share the outcomes of the meeting and invite their participation in next steps.
- Publish a report, share and market it widely.
- Share your report and experience, including resources you have created, with the community at [www.LibraryVision.org](http://www.LibraryVision.org).



## CONVENING YOUR PUBLIC DIALOGUE – SUPPORT

### Sample Talking Points

- The Aspen Institute Communications and Society Program created the Dialogue on Public Libraries to help advance the work that public libraries are doing to address community challenges and to support the transformation of public libraries for the digital age.
- To do this, the Aspen Institute brought together a select 35-member working group that met twice in the project's first year to examine the evolving societal role of the public library and to shape and advance a perspective that re-envisioning public libraries for the future.
- The result was a report, *Rising to the Challenge: Re-Envisioning Public Libraries*, that was published in October, 2014. The report is built upon the considerable knowledge, insights and experience shared by the experts in the working group. The Aspen Institute also met with key library groups and with local government administrative leaders to test its themes and benefit from their suggestions to make the report stronger.
- As the report says, the public library is no longer a nice-to-have amenity—but an essential part of a community's infrastructure and a key partner in sustaining the educational, economic and civic health of the community.
- While the mission of public libraries hasn't changed, its role in the community is changing, and so is its value proposition.
- The old library model was built around information scarcities—the high cost of storing and searching for knowledge.
- That model is giving way to an emerging value proposition that is built around the public library's three key assets—its people, place and platform.
  - **PEOPLE** - The library as people reflects the shift away from building collections to building human capital, relationships and knowledge networks in the community.
  - **PLACE** - Today's library is both a physical and virtual place, but it continues to be the physical presence of the library that anchors it most firmly in the community.
  - **PLATFORM** - The library is user-centered; it empowers users to determine what it provides and how users make use of those resources.
- According to the report, public libraries that align their services to support local community goals will find the greatest opportunities for success in the years ahead.
- And that is why we've all gathered for our own public dialogue—to discuss how our library can align its services to support the goals of our community.



# 12

## TAKING ACTION: NEXT STEPS



## MOVING FORWARD WITH NEXT STEPS

The power to re-envision public libraries is the power to re-envision our communities for success in the digital era. Re-envisioning the public library for every community will require a unity of purpose and action by stakeholders at all levels. It will require new relationships and partnerships that are nurtured and strengthened through ongoing dialogue and engagement, not a single event.

To get started, library directors, staff and their supporters must forge new partnerships and collaborations in the community and align their work with the community's goals. Leadership at the local level is crucial. Library, government and civic leaders will have to adopt new thinking about the public library. This thinking rests on understanding what makes the library uniquely valuable to the community beginning with its people, place and platform assets. It also rests on the uniquely public value proposition grounded in the principles of equity, access, opportunity, openness and participation. These are also values at the heart of American democracy.

The challenge to pick up and move forward is dependent on iteration, available resources and the commitment and vision of library and other community leaders. Specific next steps will depend upon the unique needs and priorities identified in the initial dialogue.

Here are some recommendations for initial action steps to help you chart your path forward.

- **Consider formation of an advisory group or steering committee** to continue working on development of action items, implementation and future dialogue events.
- **Bring the summary of the event to regional or statewide library meetings** or meetings of municipal leagues and associations to share experiences and encourage other communities to hold their own events. Use this opportunity to nurture a community of practice around these conversations and the promise of libraries engaging with civic leaders to transform communities.
- **Consider outreach to key stakeholders** like community foundations or other philanthropic partners to share the outcomes of the meeting and invite their participation in next steps.
- **Publish a report**, share and market it widely.
- **Share your report and experience**, including resources you have created, with the community at [www.LibraryVision.org](http://www.LibraryVision.org).



## ACTivity

**Moving Forward: Reflect on the following questions to help you in charting the action steps for moving forward.**

What has your initial dialogue revealed about what your community's priorities and needs are?

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What opportunities to forge new partnerships and strengthen existing ones has the dialogue created?

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Consider these four action verbs. What steps can you define for your library and community in order to start building your own action plan:

Leverage

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Redeploy

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Build

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Transform

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# APPENDIX

# APPENDIX I

## 5 STEPS IN PLANNING A PUBLIC DIALOGUE

### 1. Date/Venue/Name

When securing a date and a venue for your public dialogue, here are some factors to consider:

- What is the length of the event? Time of day?
- Is this one event or a dialogue that take place across multiple days?
- Are you serving refreshments or a meal?
- What are possible venues?
- What is the capacity of the selected venue? When visiting venues, keep in mind that the format of the event – panels, roundtables, town-hall – will led itself to different types of rooms.
- Consider how set-up will facilitate interaction. Will the set-up be theater-style (chairs in rows?) or will it be seating at round tables? How many at a table? If food is involved, table seating may be best.
- Who manages audio/visual needs? Is there a cost associated with those? Consider future uses of the video and photos when considering what level of A/V to use.
- If the venue does not have the proper amount of chairs and tables you may need to rent from an outside source. Make sure to ask the venue about delivery of A/V, seating, catering, etc.
- What will you title your dialogue? You can develop a catchy name for your event or just go with something that captures the spirit of the gathering: Public Dialogue for the <name here> Library.

### 2. Plan

Developing a plan that is interesting, engaging and accomplishes your goals is the most critical element in scheduling your public dialogue. Consider the following when constructing your dialogue plan:

- Start by determining the goals of your dialogue.
- Establish a common starting point. What provides context and how do attendees get to that?
- Is there one compelling speaker who can kick things off? Will s/he take questions from the audience?
- Provide a brief set of background readings (make the Aspen Institute report, *Rising to the Challenge: Re-Envisioning Public Libraries*, and other resources about the community and its aspirations available beforehand).
- If you would like to include representatives from different sectors around a topic, a panel discussion can be an effective way to accomplish this.
- Resource participants or experts provide an opportunity to bring in additional knowledge and conversation. It's also an opportunity to bring together experts from outside your community.
- Remember to have diversity among your speakers – by sector, discipline, socio-economic background, gender, race, etc.
- If you are holding a panel or roundtable, make sure to select a knowledgeable, engaging moderator who can move the dialogue along and bring up key points to be discussed.

### 3. Capturing the Dialogue

Identify one or two individuals who can take **notes** to capture the discussions taking place. Or if budget permits, consider an **audio recording** or **video recording**. One or all of these is helpful for developing a post-event summary or for a newsletter article, eblast or use on social media.

Consider assigning a staff member or volunteer to take a few photos on a phone camera to use on social media if you are live blogging or tweeting the events. These photos will also be beneficial for any follow-up promotion.

### 4. Logistics

- A/V arrangements based on agenda and/or speaker needs
- Refreshments
- Invitations to guests (see Sample Invitation – p. 72)
- Handouts or take-away material
- Promotion (see Sample News Release and Sample Social Media Post – p. 74 and 75)

### 5. Feedback

Create a way for attendees to provide feedback or other thoughts and ideas following the meeting. Feedback could be captured in many ways:

- electronic survey sent after the meeting
- evaluation card handed out at meeting or placed on chairs
- comment box in one or two locations
- email – your address provided to attendees
- phone – your number provided to attendees





## APPENDIX 2

### SAMPLE INVITATION

Consider whether you need to translate your invitation into other languages based on the composition of your community and if you should have a translator present.

Also, your dialogue may be a one-time event or a small series of two to three events dealing with specific topics.

Dear <name>:

Please join us for the <event name here> on <day>, <date>, at <location> in <room>.

The <event name> is bringing together important thought leaders from across the region and our community to discuss community goals and the role of the library in helping to meet those goals.

Throughout the country, libraries are transforming to meet the educational, economic, social and technological needs of their communities.

Your attendance and participation will add value to the discussion as we explore new opportunities for library leadership in the community, as well as the challenges in aligning existing library programs and services to help in meeting community goals.

Please RSVP by <date> to <name> <email address> or by phone, <number>.

I hope to see you on the <day ... e.g. 16<sup>th</sup>>.

Sincerely,

*First & Last Name*

## APPENDIX 3

### PROMOTION

Promoting your public dialogue is an important step in getting community engagement and making the public aware not only of the dialogue, but of how your library is keeping pace with the changing needs of the community.

#### **Promotion Opportunities**

There are many ways to promote your public dialogue. Here are a few worth considering:

#### **BEFORE THE DIALOGUE:**

- **News release** – write a news release and send it to the assignment desks at local television stations, your local newspaper(s), radio stations and any e-news outlets or bloggers that you think may be relevant. See *the sample news release in Appendix*.
- **Social media** – if your library has established social media channels – e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn – promote your public dialogue to your followers who may share the information with others.
- **Op-Ed** – writing an op ed (opinion editorial) about the transformation of public libraries is a great way to shine a light on your public dialogue – either before or after the dialogue has taken place.
- **Paid Advertising** – if your budget allows, consider running a few print ads to promote the dialogue.
- **Computer Screensavers** – add the dialogue details (date, time, etc.) to all library computer screensavers.
- **Community Signs or Banners** – community organizations (churches, YMCA, etc.) often have outdoor signs and may be willing to promote your community dialogue; or consider hanging a street banner in a well-trafficked area.
- **Partner Agencies and Collaborators** – ask your partner agencies and other collaborators if they'd be willing to send an eblast promoting your dialogue to their constituent groups or to post a flier.

#### **AFTER THE DIALOGUE:**

- **Town/Library newsletter** – a feature story in your town or library newsletter is a great vehicle for communicating information about your dialogue, including a summary of the event.
- **Blog post** – if your library has a blog, consider writing a blog post about the dialogue, or look for opportunities to write a blog post for other local blogs that may be relevant. Share the post on your social media channels and ask your partner agencies and collaborators if they will share it, too.
- **Op Ed** – writing an op-ed (opinion editorial) about the transformation of public libraries is a great way to shine a light on your public dialogue—either before or after the dialogue has taken place.



## APPENDIX 4

As mentioned on Appendix 2, Sample Invitation, your dialogue may be a one-time event or a small series of two to three events dealing with specific topics. You can tailor your news release accordingly.

### SAMPLE NEWS RELEASE

<put sample release on your letterhead>

#### NEWS RELEASE

#### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: <name here>  
<phone>  
<email>

#### <YOUR LIBRARY> TO HOST PUBLIC DIALOGUE TO DISCUSS COMMUNITY GOALS AND THE LIBRARY'S ROLE

**City, State, Date** – On <day>, <date>, <library here> will host <event name> from <time – e.g. 7-9 pm> in the <room> and <location>.

The <library name> <event name> is designed to bring together representatives from various community groups, companies, organizations and political leaders to discuss the role of the library in anticipating and responding to the educational, economic, social and technological transformations necessary to meet community goals.

<insert quote from library director, board chair or other key individual> Sample quote: “Through the <library name> <event name> we will explore ways in which the library can help advance the community,” says <name, title, affiliation>. “This dialogue will explore new thinking and identify opportunities and challenges in aligning the programs and services of the library with the needs of our community. We hope it will lead to new partnerships, enhanced efficiencies and increased awareness about how our library is an essential community asset.”

The agenda for the dialogue is as follows:  
<agenda here>

For more information about the <library name> <event name>, <action here – call, email, web site>.

-end-

## APPENDIX 5

### SAMPLE SOCIAL MEDIA POST

A great, free online resource for developing a variety of social media posts is [www.canva.com](http://www.canva.com).

The following social media post is an example of what a Facebook post could look like to promote your library's community dialogue.

SAMPLE FACEBOOK POST

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# Community Conversation

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Join us!

"Aligning Library Priorities with the  
Changing Needs of Our Community"

ABC Community Center  
123 Main Street, Anytown

Thursday, February 18, 2016  
7:00 - 9:00 p.m.

You also could sharpen the focus or interest by adding:

in \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank ... the digital age; the new economy; an era of continual change; an innovation-driven economy).