
Public Libraries



Synopsis

Research and background information on the constantly changing and evolving state of public libraries. Particular focus is shown towards the growth of digital media and digital creation and its impact on the structure of libraries in the future

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Role and purpose of background reports



This background report was developed to provide input to the NashvilleNext planning process. It was researched and authored by community members interested, involved, and knowledgeable on the topic. The authors present best practices, an evaluation of the state of the topic in the Nashville community today, and recommendations for consideration during the planning process.

This report provides a *starting point* for broader community discussion and reflection based on the research and recommendations of the authors. Throughout the planning process, NashvilleNext will use this and other background reports, ongoing research, departmental involvement, community input and engagement to discuss, refine and formulate the policies and recommendations for the general plan.

The information and recommendations provided in this background report are solely those of the authors and contributors and are being provided at the beginning of the NashvilleNext process to start community discussion.

The NashvilleNext Steering Committee thanks and extends its sincere appreciation to the authors of and contributors to this background report for the time and effort to provide this report for community consideration and discussion. The Steering Committee looks forward to the ongoing dialogue on the issues and recommendations that the authors provide.

Any final policies and recommendations endorsed by the NashvilleNext Steering Committee for the consideration of the Metropolitan Planning Commission will be the result of the entire planning process and upcoming community engagement and discussion.

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Introduction

For the NashvilleNext visioning process, we are asked to look forward at the future of libraries in our city: from 2015 to 2040, 25 years into the future. Given the pace of change in our society, is it possible to predict meaningfully what will be asked of this civic function a quarter century from now? Let's consider the question from another perspective: 25 years into the past from 2015 would bring us to 1990. Perhaps taking a moment to look back can help us to look forward: in what ways have libraries changed between 1990 and 2015, and more importantly, is there anything which remains constant? Those elements could give us a sense of the enduring, technology-independent library services which citizens expect.

To provide some context, keep in mind that the World Wide Web was not available. It was not made public until 1991⁽¹⁾; the first widely used, graphical web browser, NCSA Mosaic, was not released until 1993⁽²⁾. So in 1990, the general public's awareness and access to the internet was minimal. By comparing how libraries provided access to knowledge in 1990 to how they fulfill this function today, we can therefore observe a key transition. How did a library patron in 1990 find what she was looking for? Some libraries in 1990 had computerized catalogs accessible on-site, but electronic catalog functionality was much more limited than it is now. Card catalogs persisted, particularly in smaller libraries, and even at large or academic libraries, advanced search capacities were still being produced in print form. Consider, just as one example, the Scientific Citation Index, a series then available as many shelves of hardcover books, vital to researchers for tracking citations of a given journal article and the growth of knowledge about a specific topic. This function is now transformed into the cloud-based Thomson Reuters product Web of Knowledge⁽³⁾ accessed over the Internet. Instead of purchasing books in the series as they were issued, libraries now purchase time-limited rights to offer access to the Web of Knowledge online to their patrons - in or out of the physical library building. In 1990, databases, if in digital form at all, were still physically

located in the library (i.e., on CD or other disk format) and accessed at dedicated terminals. Of course, libraries did not have electronic book lending capacity; the concept of an electronic book as something readers could access on a convenient appliance for a paper-like book experience had not yet been realized.

Now we can observe, with meta-resources such as databases – and even with books themselves – that the meaning of “access” has changed. “Access” now includes, alongside the traditional mode of loan of a physical object, the rights to access an electronic instance of the informational object. This broadening echoes a larger transition in our society from a focus on the economics of things to the economics of information⁽⁴⁾. We are now immersed in a way

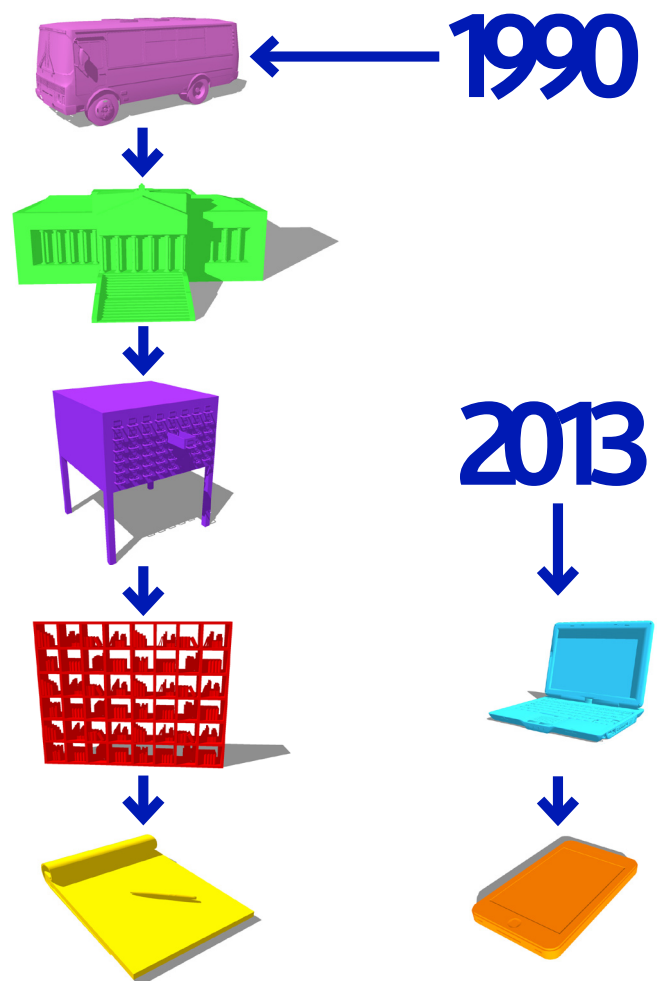


Figure 1: Accessibility of information

we have never been before, in a flood of information, access to information, and choices about what information to trust. Luciano Floridi, a philosopher of information, has noted that “...only very recently has human progress and welfare begun to depend mostly on the successful and efficient management of the life cycle of information”⁽⁶⁾; he contends that we must understand ourselves as informational organisms acting in an “infosphere” – an all-encompassing environment of information that surrounds humans and other living things as well as the physical objects we create⁽⁷⁾. Thus we recognize that, like so many production technologies and services in our society, libraries must contend with the impact of the newly possible separation between information and things. At the same time, the role of information in human well-being is greater than ever. If libraries serve only as physical warehouses for information in physical form, to be accessed by physically present patrons, then their function and existence is at risk. However, taking another look at the library in 1990 can show us that their function has always been much broader.

Visiting the library in 1990, and visiting it today, what do we see that has not changed? Both then and now, we see people coming together for community – for meetings, for continued education, for cultural events, and for shared interests. We could see in 1990, and can still see today, students using the public library as a safe, resource-rich place to study and learn outside of school hours. We continue to see the library as a place where experts in information access are available to help people of all ages, resources, and ability levels access the evolving infosphere – in whatever form it takes – for learning, entertainment, civic engagement, and professional development. And – last but not least – access is free to citizens. These char-

When information is carried by things...it goes where the things go and no further. It is constrained to follow the linear flow of the physical value chain. But once everyone is connected electronically, information can travel by itself. The traditional link between the flow of product-related information and the flow of the product itself, between the economics of information and the economics of things, can be broken. What is truly revolutionary about the explosion in connectivity is the possibility it offers to unbundle information from its physical carrier.

Evans and Wurster, 1997 (5)

acteristics should still remain as part of the municipal public library of twenty-five years in the future. Libraries, as centers of information access, have always had a closer connection to the infosphere than other civic functions, and libraries have served as mediators for citizens as they come together and navigate that space. This role can and should continue in a healthy metropolis. In the following pages we explore the ways in which libraries of the future can continue to serve Nashville’s residents.



Puppet show at the Main library



Main library courtyard

The Library Evolves with Changing Technology

Technological change and increased connectivity has become the defining feature of our age, and this will only accelerate in future decades. In this section, we examine ways in which the library has and will adjust to a rapidly changing technological environment, and how it also helps its patrons to do so.

Digital libraries and physical libraries:

Libraries are in the business of “connecting people to resources (both print and online) and ideas which may include books, virtual reference, e-books and training.”⁽⁹⁾ However, the technology age warrants a much different library than society experienced even ten years ago. Libraries in the future will utilize technology to increase all of their holdings. In essence, libraries will be digital in almost all aspects of their operations and holdings. While there are multiple conceptions of what a “digital library” exactly entails, a useful definition remains “a managed collection of information, with associated services, where the information is stored in digital formats and accessible over a network.”⁽¹⁰⁾ The idea is simple: allow access to all library holdings through the internet 24/7. In order for libraries of the future to adhere to this deceptively simple criterion, they must adopt a structure that will permit them to do so.

The structure of the online library of the future is envisioned as having three distinct parts: the digital library, the digital library system and the digital library management system.⁽¹¹⁾ The digital library is a virtual entity that collects, manages and preserves digital content used by individuals in a given community. The content is specialized to that community’s needs and the library’s policies. The digital library system is a software system utilized by the community to access the digital holdings of a library, which again provides functionality specific to the particular library. The digital library management is a more generic software system which provides an infrastructure for functions considered basic and which allows integration of specialized software tailored to the particular library’s needs.⁽¹²⁾

Ironically, the unavoidable demand for online library services does not eliminate the need for physical libraries. The library’s facilities store more than tangible books; they store art, manuscripts, artifacts, videos, music and – in our city’s library – even puppets for special children’s events through Wishing Chair Productions, carrying on a tradition that goes back to 1938.⁽¹³⁾ Our library’s existing preservation achievements such as the Nashville Room, the archives of the Nashville Banner, and the Civil Rights Collection

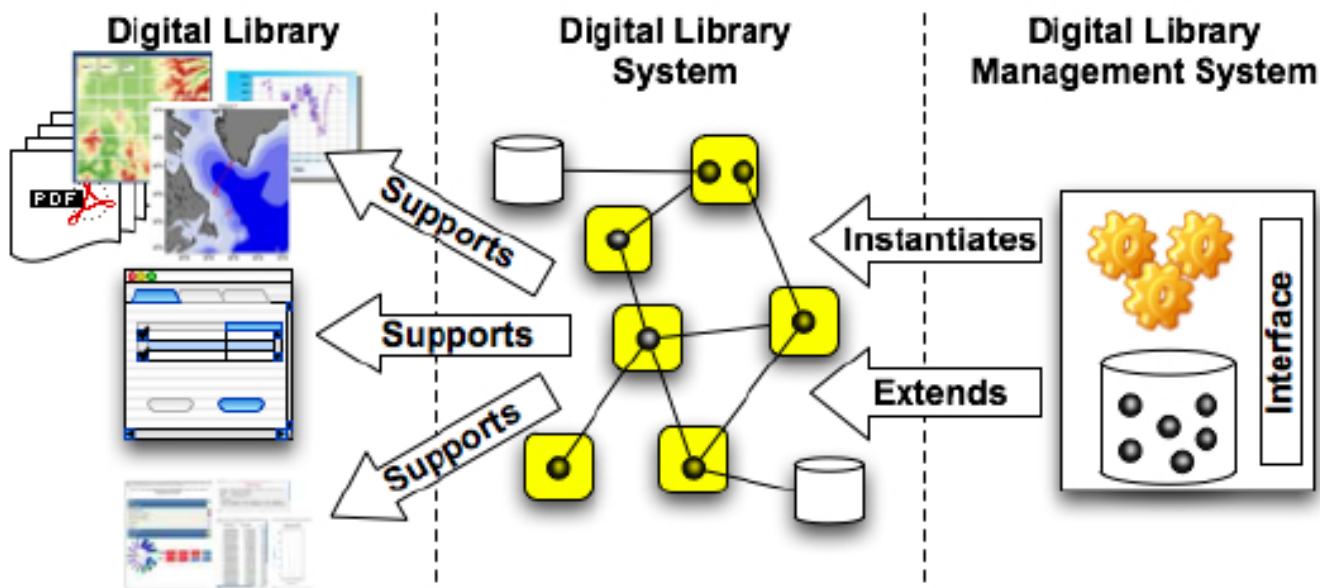


Figure 2: Structure of the online library of the future, a three tier framework

are examples of how libraries maintain the historical memories of communities. This role will continue: public libraries will need to continue to preserve manuscripts, art, photographs, newspapers, audios, videos, and other important archival material in a variety of formats that are important to citizens. Preservation of all collections will include digitization for easy access at any time and any place via mobile technology, while keeping the integrity of the paper-based documents, films, photos, and other materials. Public libraries will continue to be players in the development of global archiving and dissemination systems, and the maintenance of these new systems for consumers of all ages. Even in 2040, however, it will still be the case that precious source materials need to be maintained intact – so physical space to store and benefit from these resources will still be needed.

It is also likely that brick-and-mortar libraries will still be needed to provide an access point to the growing infosphere for those who lack home access, even as the technology used will undoubtedly evolve into new forms. A Gates Foundation study in 2006 found that 71 percent of people using public libraries reported that the library was their primary source of access to a computer and the online environment. ⁽¹⁵⁾ While the overall proportion of American households without internet is about two-fifths, the share without home online access rises for low-income families and the unemployed; it is also higher among Black and Hispanic households. ⁽¹⁶⁾ Significantly, 64 percent of libraries report that they are the sole source for free internet access in their communities. ⁽¹⁷⁾

The future will bring new types of “workshop” for content creation. As just one example, 3D printers, which “print” three-dimensional objects in plastic or other materials based on designs created by the user, are now beginning to reach a price-point and ease of use that will eventually bring them into homes. ⁽¹⁹⁾ Whatever technology develops around novel tools for content creation, the library can still remain a space for first exposure, equitable access, and community collaboration.

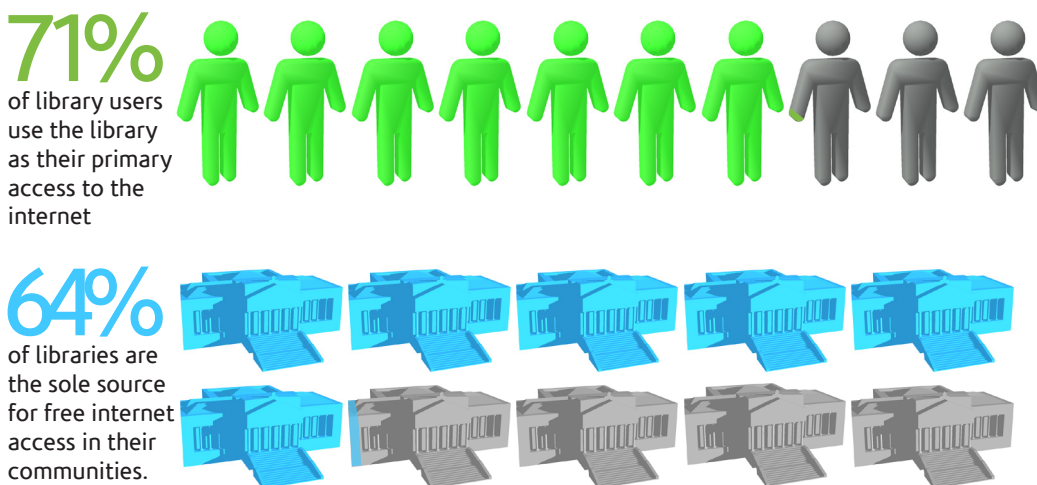


Figure 3: Gates Foundation Study

Legislative environment

The Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) was passed into law in 1996. This Federal legislation replaced the Library Services and Construction Act of 1962. The Act continues to provide a mechanism for federal grant support, buttressed by a state matching requirement, to flow to libraries – but also includes a greater explicit emphasis on technology initiatives than past legislation. The purposes of LSTA include the following:

1. Stimulate excellence and promote access to learning and information resources in all types of libraries for individuals of all ages;
2. Promote library services that provide all users access to information through state, regional, national and international electronic networks;
3. Provide linkages between and among libraries;
4. Promote targeted library services to people of diverse geographic, cultural and socioeconomic background, to individuals with disabilities, and to people with limited functional literacy or information skills ⁽⁸⁾.

E-Content:

When purchasing holdings, today's library must consider various forms of content. According to the Nashville Public Library staff, e-content has grown over 400 percent in the past few years.⁽²⁰⁾ For instance, while libraries in the past bought one physical copy of a book for consumers to check out, now libraries must purchase the hardcopy, a large-print edition, an e-book, and even other versions of the same book to allow downloads on tablets, phones or audio devices. Libraries must obtain the latest technology for electronic access to their holdings at the same time that they continue to maintain earlier forms of access, from the physical form onwards to serve the needs of all patrons. While demand for physical books may decline in time, there is also the possibility that as they become more rare outside of libraries, patrons will seek them out on purpose.

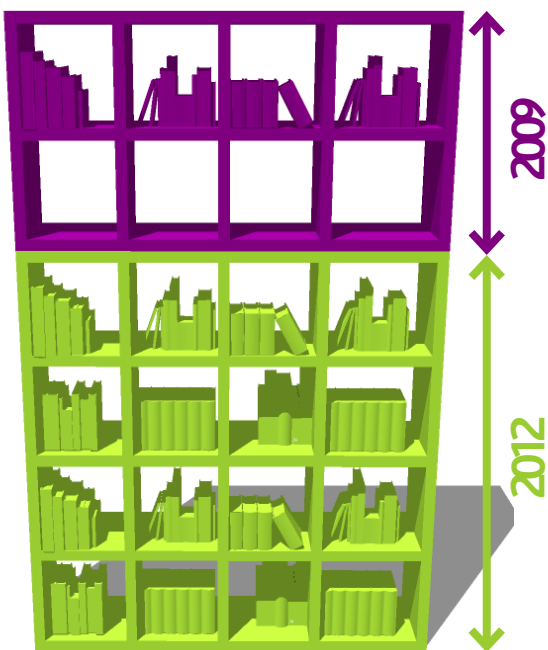


Figure 4: Growth of E-Content

Staffing implications of technological change:

Libraries are transforming, in part, into technology centers, and they are faced with hiring and retaining qualified staff that can meet the changing needs of the public they serve. Libraries have traditionally been very good at staffing related to children's needs, but as the world becomes more technologically demanding, library staff members are increasingly assisting older adult populations who are unfamiliar with current technology required by employers. Most of today's jobs and transactions require email addresses and some level of computer proficiency. As a result, adult users go to the public library in order to use computers, and often, they need assistance because they are unfamiliar with the technology. This need makes it incumbent on libraries to hire new staff that are technologically proficient or to provide training for current staff. The demand to keep staff abreast of technological change will not abate in the foreseeable future.

Branch structures:

As a result of declining resources, future libraries will need to embrace the idea of operating leaner. This will include downsizing buildings and staff to save on facilities maintenance and personnel costs. According to Nashville Public Library staff, eighty-five percent of resources are spent on staff support and building maintenance. Around ten to fifteen percent of the remaining resources are allocated towards the collections.⁽²¹⁾ Since the local library is viewed by many as the heart or center of the community, closing a branch of the library is a daunting, almost impossible task. Therefore, future libraries will utilize alternative methods for library tasks, including checking out resources, returning print content and access-

Fountaindale Library

Beyond basic access to hardware and the internet, the physical space provided by the library can also facilitate innovative collaboration in use of technology and new content creation. This objective is achieved by offering a space and tools for community members to use. One recent example of a library moving towards digital media creation services is Chicago's Fountaindale Library.

The Fountaindale Library is developing a 7,000 square foot space called Studio 300, with a budget of \$3 million. Studio 300 will include:

- 6 sound recording studios
- 2 video recording studios
- 3 group collaboration rooms with integrated technology, dual monitor workstations, and video conferencing equipment. ⁽¹⁸⁾

ing the web. Emerging ideas such as “dropboxes” and “net-return” locations will provide many library functions found at traditional branches, but at a much cheaper cost, perhaps facilitating a smaller physical footprint at some locations. ⁽²²⁾ The future form of the physical library’s distributed structure in our city will develop in response to fiscal conditions and demand for digital library services. However, a branch structure that continues to offer physical space for all the needs described in this paper will still have to be maintained equitably.

The Library can meet Evolving Community Needs in Innovative Ways

Technological changes are not the only type of change affecting both our society and the role of libraries. We are witnessing a period of important new demographic patterns, related to factors including age and migration. As our community moves forward, there are some novel or enhanced ways in which the library can play an important role; in this section we consider both demographic changes and their impact, and some of these new modes of library service.

Demographics and Age Diversity:

For years public libraries have been serving communities and creating positive library experiences for their patrons. But as public libraries in the United States move forward in their long-range general planning efforts, they will need to take into consideration that the populations that they once served are changing. Population growth and demographics are changing rapidly. The American population is anticipated to increase from 309 million in 2010 to 438 million by 2050; about four-fifths of this increase will arise from immigrants and their descendants born here. The U.S. is becoming more diverse with respect to race, ethnicity and national origin: immigrants made up about 12 percent of our population in 2005 as

compared with nearly 20 percent anticipated in 2050. We are also becoming older as a nation: by 2050, it is estimated that about one-fifth of Americans will be over the age of 65. ⁽²³⁾

A study conducted by Sin and Kim found that, when other factors are accounted for, households headed by ethnic minorities are still less frequent library users than those headed by non-Hispanic whites. ⁽²⁴⁾ The authors find this fact particularly notable given projections for the growth of ethnic minorities as a percentage of U.S. population. Moving forward over the next 25 years, public libraries will need to address changes in populations of library users, while increasing access for groups that have not been as frequent users in the past or who may face barriers in access. These groups include the disabled population and the elderly in addition to recent immigrants and ethnic minorities in general.

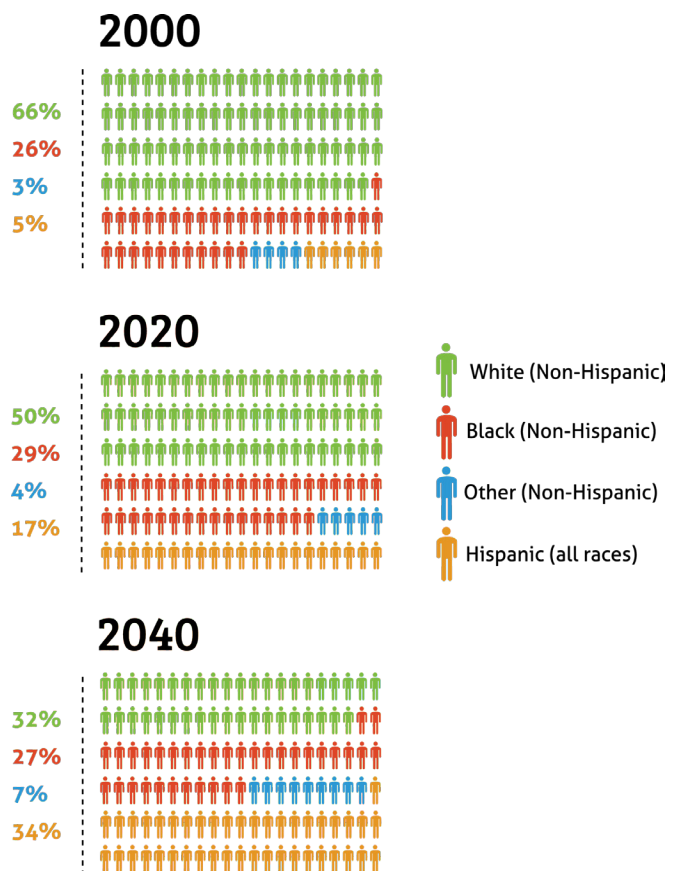


Figure 5: Nashville’s changing demographics

Public libraries will have to take into consideration the costs associated with implementing outreach efforts to include these under-served groups. Access to the library and its services may be a problem for these groups; distance may be an important factor impacting library use for immigrants, the elderly, or disabled populations. It is important for libraries to include collections and services relevant to the particular needs of these groups.⁽²⁶⁾ This could be accomplished by creating an extensive foreign language collection or involvement in literacy efforts. Some immigrant populations may be unaware of services offered at the public library; targeted marketing could be used to provide this information.

Locally, Nashville public libraries are creating innovative ways to offer access to less-advantaged groups. One way is to locate library book machines at local stores within communities who might have less access to the general public library branches.⁽²⁷⁾ Spaces are being designed in library branches to meet the needs of under-served groups. Nashville Public Libraries are especially focusing on providing services to immigrant and elderly populations along with providing services for teenage residents.

In order to move forward in the next 25 years, public libraries must continue take into consideration population growth and demographic changes in their general long-range planning efforts. Public libraries would find it beneficial to look at collaborative efforts from all levels of government, nonprofit agencies, and civic organizations in order to address issues of information inequity.

Library Partnerships with Public Schools:

A new idea that is currently evolving in Nashville is to partner public libraries with local public schools. This opportunity combines public library resources with those in public schools to offer students more holdings in both digital and print media. Public libraries can strengthen their community partnerships

by out-of-the box educational initiatives. Currently public libraries are focusing on important educational programs such as STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics), which will continue to be a goal in the next 10 to 20 years. According to Jennifer Hopwood, Head of Youth Services at the Franklin T. DeGroot Memorial Library, “While arts and humanities programs should not be ignored, by incorporating STEM into what we are already doing, we are opening the door for libraries to expand services beyond arts and humanities to offer more well-rounded learning environments.”⁽²⁸⁾

By providing services for students during evenings and weekends, public libraries will continue to close gaps created by shorter school days and decreased school library budgets that impact classroom teaching time and resources. Additionally, public libraries will provide innovative services, such as Science Clubs for Children (hands-on science), Early Child Ready-to-Read programs, Family Literacy, and Foreign Language Book Discussion Groups, which have the potential to benefit whole families if such partnerships are realized. The beauty of the partnership is that these programs could be accessed at the local school

library, so commuting long distances to attend such events will no longer be necessary. Immigrant populations, who underutilize public libraries, may find it comfortable and convenient to visit local school libraries with their children.

Limitless Libraries, a program created by Metro Nashville Public Schools and the Nashville Public Library, has been an enormous success in linking the public library and schools. The program’s goals are to improve school libraries, foster resource sharing between the two institutions, and improve student access to learning materials. This program should continue to be a major focus for both the Public Library and Public Schools because of its benefits for both organizations and the community.

“I received the fundamentals of my education in school, but that was not enough. My real education, the superstructure, the details, the true architecture, I got out of the public library. For an impoverished child whose family could not afford to buy books, the library was the open door to wonder and achievement, and I can never be sufficiently grateful that I had the wit to charge through that door and make the most of it.”

-Isaac Asimov

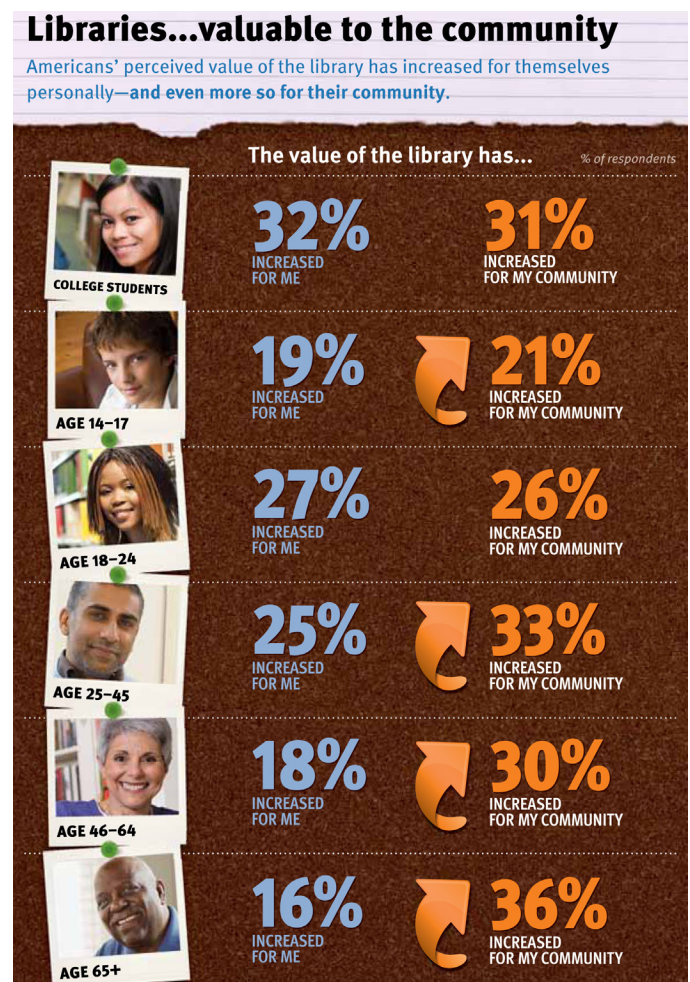
In some cases, the children might be able to assist their parents in accessing library resources that would benefit the parents in employment opportunities. In addition, public libraries could benefit by needing fewer facilities to ensure that the public has equal access to holdings. With shrinking local school budgets, and fewer resources for public libraries, expanding this type of partnership needs to be considered not just in Middle Tennessee, but throughout the state.

The Public Library as a Community Center

The public library as a community center: Place-based community institutions have a long tradition of serving as key stabilizers in neighborhoods across the United States, and the public library has long been one of these institutions. Public libraries have traditionally offered educational materials, public meeting spaces, social clubs, reading programs, child development activities and special events (e.g. author book signings, public lectures). Edwards states, “More than just books and banks of computers, libraries are still places where individuals gather to explore, interact, and imagine.”⁽²⁹⁾ In relation to their role as community-based institutions, the Public Library Association has concluded that public libraries “revitalize struggling or depressed neighborhoods and downtowns... [and] serve as places where people come to know themselves and their communities.”⁽³⁰⁾ Since the beginning of the Great Recession in 2008, OCLC reports a 31 percent increase the perception of the public library as a key community asset by local residents.⁽³¹⁾ As with many institutions, however, the role of public libraries as place-based community organizations is changing. Increasingly, public libraries are serving multiple, non-traditional roles in the physical, and virtual, world of social interaction; libraries are increasingly functioning as community centers outside of the world of books, newspapers and magazines.

Community centers differ from traditional public libraries in that they offer activities ranging from exercise classes to art studio space to tutoring and afterschool instruction. The role of public libraries as core community institutions places them in a vital position as leaders in community development. For example, in the Atlanta Metro Public Library system a patron can participate in yoga classes, coffee klatches, music concerts, poetry slams, newborn care mentoring, and small business development training.⁽³²⁾ In addition to the expansion of library activities toward community center activities, public libraries are also tackling the expanded concept of community by creating virtual meeting places and resource centers. The vast changes to the knowledge commons has resulted in shifting strategies in the distribution of that knowledge.

Figure 6: OCLC study on Library perception⁽³¹⁾



The library as a community center is a common strategy in the changing conceptualization of the public library across the country. Nashville has also taken steps toward this transition. Recently, the Metro system has held teen gaming afternoons, poetry slams, art exhibits, music concerts and computer seminars. The question for the future is whether the transition will result in a complete partnership between traditional community centers, the public library system, and other key community stakeholders wherein the library becomes the main center of community development activity. Even as the evolution of the infosphere expands the possibilities of intangible interaction, the library as community center can meet the perpetual need for personal, face-to-face connection: “People may go to the library looking mainly for information, but they find each other there.”⁽³⁴⁾

Integration of the Public Library and the Provision of Community Services:

Every day, 300,000 job seekers seek help from public libraries.⁽³⁵⁾ Often, job seekers are also in need of other types of community services. Perhaps they need to know about social programs or legal aid or student loans. Perhaps they are concerned with their blood pressure or mental health due to stress from the job search process. The public library, in addition to offering free access to the internet, has the potential and the capacity to expand its role in not only offering information about community services, but serving as the central repository for that information. Through the creation of a central repository, the process for accessing information about and applications for community services could be streamlined.

In addition to streamlining workforce development and employment services, the public library has the capacity, through its role as a key community institution, to serve as the central repository for information about social services and public health initiatives.

One idea is to create a social service kiosk in the public library where patrons can access a centralized online database to apply for government aid programs. Information about those programs would be available at the kiosks, and biweekly trainings on the programs, the application process and eligibility screening would be offered. Finally, public libraries can aid in assisting diverse populations through ESL courses for immigrant populations and by offering a safe place for and information to youth and all people.⁽³⁷⁾ By integrating community service information into its service portfolio, the public library further solidifies itself as the key public neighborhood institution.

Changes in Library Use

With the Internet having put increasingly powerful business tools into the hands of individuals, more people are working and operating businesses from home. To such people, the library offers not just a refuge from the isolation of their house, it also provides temporary office space complete with podcast recording studios, conference rooms and editing stations. At the same time, the library has developed into an entrepreneurial zone where business people from various backgrounds coalesce, work together and then disperse in much the same way that film production crews have always done.

Thomas Frey-
The Da Vinci Institute⁽³³⁾

Colorado Model

More than 40 participating libraries across Colorado are offering computer workstations called Virtual Workforce Centers that are funded by the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment. The Virtual Workforce Center offers free online services and features, including services for job seekers, resume tools, job interview assistance, and more. Employers, too, can use the Virtual Workforce Center to post jobs and search the database for suitable applicants. The Ouray Library's Virtual Workforce Center also features a camera and microphone to enable job counselors to consult with job seekers by appointment.⁽³⁶⁾

Conclusion

We envision the Nashville public libraries of the future as places where collections are balanced – both physical and digital; the focus is on both individuals and the communities; collections are maintained while creation of ideas and content is supported; and access to all resources and services is provided along with archival knowledge. We see our libraries staying relevant, continuing to serve as a transformational force in the community while satisfying our growing demand for information. Based on the content of this paper, we would like to offer the following recommendations for consideration during the NashvilleNext planning process related to public library services in Nashville.

Recommendations

Budgetary allocations are continuing to decrease for public Libraries. However, the demand for digital media has increased exponentially. The Public Library will need to be creative when allocating resources necessary to meet the community demands for digital media, while at the same time balancing the community's demands for adequate physical spaces.

Physical spaces must be maintained, but should be structured in a way to meet future demands. Footprints may be able to be reduced in some areas as services are maintained and enhanced digitally, but well-designed and distributed physical space will continue to be critical for the communal gathering function which branches serve. A good example the committee would like to reference is Fountaindale Library in Chicago, which is developing “Studio 300” for content creation by patrons as discussed earlier in this paper.

Public libraries will continue to be community centers and should continue to plan to expand services to enhance this role.

Public libraries should continue their role in maintaining the collective memory of the community through preservation technologies. This critical role maintains a sense of history and identity for the city.

Public libraries and public schools should continue to expand the current relationships that exist between the two entities, but should also seek new innovative ways to combine resources, allowing this partnership to thrive in the future in a way that enhances both of these critical municipal functions.

With the large immigrant populations that reside in the middle Tennessee area, the local public libraries will need to consider the types of services such groups will need by 2040. Efforts should be made to reach out to these communities to demonstrate the types of services offered by the public library, and creative ways in which services can be brought closer to these communities and made more welcoming should be considered.

Finally, low-income citizens will continue to utilize technology resources at public libraries due to lack of home access. The library as a civic institution should continue to play a role in improving equity of access to the infosphere. Therefore, public libraries will need to continue to provide on-site the necessary hardware, internet access, and trained staff as technology evolves.

Public librarians know their communities firsthand, and are often the first to recognize a pressing local need, simply because they interact on a daily basis with patrons from all walks of life. This puts libraries and librarians in the best position not only to bring local issues to municipal governments and social agencies, but also to partner with local governments and agencies to address the needs of a community. ⁽³⁸⁾

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