



# IQ SERVICE REPORT

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## THE ROLE OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

America's public libraries are climbing an upward path into the twenty-first century. Like all local government services, they are facing dramatic change, and, like other services, they are adapting rapidly to meet it.

Challenges to libraries include the transition from print to electronic media, the new interest in libraries as "destinations," the demands of patrons for new and expanded services, and the complexity of modern information service technology.

This report examines the changing role of libraries and library staff, provides examples of trend-setting innovations, and explains the issues most public libraries will face in the near future. A comprehensive case study of the St. Louis Public Library illustrates the value of partnering as the library adapts to new community conditions and needs.



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# The Role of the Public Library

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The challenges to the public library as we approach the twenty-first century are obvious. The book—the centerpiece of the library’s heritage—is not dead, but many books are being published initially in electronic form. The Internet has become an economic force, and in it libraries have found a new tool for the delivery of reading and information services. Public libraries are expanding their role in the community: In the past, many local leaders saw libraries only as quaint placeholders in the civic landscape, beside the court house and the city hall. Now, forward thinking urban officials regard libraries as civic assets that can help neighborhood and downtown redevelopment, attract businesses, and enhance quality of life.

At the same time that public libraries in many communities are becoming family “destinations” as popular as many shopping centers and sports venues, these same libraries are increasingly virtual—providing information and reading services to millions of people who connect electronically from their homes or offices. The library as a place and the virtual library are growing side by side with one purpose: serving the essential reading and information needs of their communities.

The library of the future will serve the same multiple functions as the library of the past and the library of the present. Public libraries are educational institutions, cultural organizations, information resources, and community centers. Libraries serve everyone, regardless of race, sex, economic status, religion, or citizenship. Libraries

- Meet people’s diverse interests and needs for information, knowledge, and recreation
- Provide entertainment, social and learning opportunities, and the love of reading
- Serve people with special needs, such as the elderly, partially sighted, hearing-impaired, and those needing assistive technology
- Help people better themselves, stay off welfare, find employment, become entrepreneurs, and protect themselves from harm

Libraries serve as the “people’s university”—sponsoring literary and citizenship programs for immigrants, imparting childcare and parenting skills to babysitters and new parents, teaching classes, providing homework assistance, proctoring exams, and offering distance learning classes and resources from universities for all citizens. Libraries bridge the past, present, and future by archiving the old, managing and evaluating the new, and preparing for future information resources, regardless of their format. Librarians are information navigators, finding the right resources to answer the user’s questions, whether those resources are in print, online, or in an electronic format. Libraries touch the lives of most Americans, and usually change them for the better. There are no indications that the public library’s basic mission will change in the new century.

In all the areas of its mission, however, the public library must be flexible, providing services, resources, and systems that change as the community and its needs change.

The first half of this report discusses “books, bytes, bodies, buildings, and beyond,” addressing the role of public libraries and the importance of partnerships to their future. The second half provides a case study of the St. Louis Public Library’s recent growth and its partnering activities.

## BOOKS: THE FUTURE OF PRINT AND THE VIRTUAL LIBRARY

During the past century, the book has been “replaced” by paperbacks, movies, radio, microfilm, audiocassettes, CDs, copiers, computers, video, television, electronic books, and other media that came into vogue, but the book has emerged stronger than ever. Witness the success of Amazon.com with its selection of three million titles, the proliferation of Barnes and Noble and Borders bookstores, and the demand on the public library when Oprah Winfrey announces the latest title to her Book Club.

### Who uses the library?

In May 1998, a Gallup poll found that during the previous year, 66 percent of Americans had visited public libraries at least once (a 13 percent increase since 1978), and 64 percent of adults had current library cards. The poll reported that

- Baby boomers (35-54 years old) were the largest age group of library users (43 percent)
- 53 percent of all library users are women
- 65 percent are college educated
- The biggest users earned between \$20,000 and \$40,000 per year.

Of those people who visited a library in person,

- 81 percent checked out a book
- 50 percent read newspapers and magazines
- 51 percent used the libraries' reference materials
- 32 percent borrowed audio-visual materials
- 17 percent connected to the Internet
- 15 percent attended a class or program
- 65 percent had consulted a librarian for assistance
- 19 percent had called the library on the phone to obtain information
- 9 percent connected to the library's Internet site from home.

Source: "ALA News," *American Libraries* 29:7 (August 1998), page 6.

The book still offers a lot of advantages. It is portable, doesn't need a machine, fits in your pocket, goes to the beach, can be read in the bathtub, and is affordable. Books make economic, ecological, and technological sense.<sup>1</sup>

Like library use, reading and book publishing are not declining. The number of books published in the United States increased by 46 percent from 1990 to 1996 (from 46,743 titles in 1990 to 68,175 in 1996).<sup>2</sup>

Most libraries report that total usage is increasing. The Los Angeles Public Library system reported a ten percent increase in circulation of library materials between 1996/97 and 1997/98. Libraries are spending at least 60 percent of their materials budgets on print materials, although the percentages devoted to licensing of databases and online information are growing.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile, virtual libraries are proliferating as extensions of public library services, providing non-traditional services along with print media. The Los Angeles Public Library's virtual library project, funded primarily with private money, networked its 67 branches and its central library with hundreds of databases maintained by other organizations. Library director Susan Kent refers to it as the "library without walls within the library's walls."

Although the conversion of all existing library materials to digital form is too expensive and too formidable to undertake at this time (see sidebar on the electronic book), many library materials work better in a digital format. Examples are local historic photographs, scholarly or secondary journals, out-of-print materials, maps, rare or special collections, abstracts, indexes, directories, short-lived reference books, government documents, conference proceedings, price guides, financial or legal updates, census data, scientific information, and other ephemeral, rarely-accessed, or scarce materials.

Unlike paper materials, which are purchased by the library, digital resources are licensed from information providers. These licenses will require larger percentages of the library's materials budget in the future.

Less than 5 percent of the world's recorded knowledge and information is in digital format. Although Project Gutenberg, the digital library project of the Library of Congress (LC), can convert up to 5,000 books of 200 pages each per year, that only represents 3 percent of LC's annual acquisitions.<sup>4</sup> It would cost one billion dollars to digitize just the 17 million books in the Library of Congress, without considering the 95 million other documents in the collection.<sup>5</sup> The life span of digital data is 10 to 25 years, less than the life span of print, so there would need to be a means of reconverting the digital format on a regular cycle. Even if the archival media can be made permanent, the hardware and software needed to read it would have to last as long. The 1960 U.S. Census data, which was archived on a proprietary magnetic tape, could be read by only two machines in the world a decade later.<sup>6</sup>

### Each new medium strengthens, complements, and supplements the old, rarely replacing it.

The solution is balance. As each technology develops, it is added to the library's collection where appropriate. Each new medium strengthens, complements, and supplements the old, rarely replacing it. Walt Crawford, who analyzes information systems for the Research Libraries Group, states, "Various types of media are like tools in a toolkit. You don't throw away the hammer because you got a drill and a saw. They serve different purposes—and sometimes offer better ways to get things done."<sup>7</sup> Photography did not replace painting; videos did not replace movies; recordings did not replace live music; and the television news has not replaced newspapers. They all continue to coexist and add to our learning and visual experience.

While some media have almost disappeared from the commercial market (phonograph records, 16mm and 8mm films, reel-to-reel tape) and others are on the demise (audiocassettes and analog video

cassettes), the public library will continue circulating even these items because there will still be customers with players to use them. The public library needs to stay a little ahead of users in the implementation of technology, but its collections need to stay a little behind for those who prefer the older formats. When it becomes too costly to store, maintain, and handle the little-used older media, the public library will also discontinue providing them.

### BYTES: LIBRARY LEADERSHIP IN TECHNOLOGY

The public library's role is changing from archivist to information creator and organizer, as electronic information is proliferated and distributed without a formal structure. *Congressional Quarterly* referred to the Internet as "a library without librarians."<sup>8</sup> This vast amount of information is evaluated, sorted, and made accessible through library home pages and linkages. The librarian, or information navigator, is in greater demand today than ever before.

The library provides Internet access for many people who do not have computers at home, as well as for people who are doing research in the library. People who do have Internet access at home are still coming to the library to learn more about topics they have encountered on the Internet. Networked computers have drawn attention to the library and have brought about a revival of interest in literacy, which can now be defined as "access to information," not just the ability to read in English.<sup>9</sup>

Libraries have generally led the way in automation and technology. Some traditional library services that will be enhanced in the new century include:

- Reference questions answered by e-mail or fax
- Electronic journals, especially in science, technology, and medical fields
- The ability to place reserves, check material availability, and verify patron records from home or office
- Electronic union catalogs that merge the records of many libraries, with holdings at the local level shown first.

Additional new and expanded library services, some now being offered in libraries as pilot projects, include:

- Universal "smart" library cards that permit patrons to borrow and return materials at any library, as well as pay fines, use card-operated equipment, and access other fee-based services
- Interlibrary loan requests and unfilled inquiries that automatically trigger library purchases for consideration
- Catalogs linked to Amazon.com or Barnesandnoble.com that enable customers to order books not available at the local or nearby libraries and can provide a revenue source to the library

### The relevance of libraries in the digital age

Through the Gates Library Initiative, Bill and Melinda Gates are giving \$400 million in cash and computer equipment to public libraries to bring digital technology into low-income communities. Gates' role model is Andrew Carnegie, the steel magnate who, on the threshold of the twentieth century, offered to build and equip public libraries if local communities would donate the land and maintain the libraries he constructed. His \$41.2 million contributions built 1,650 Carnegie libraries across the nation between 1890 and 1917. Carnegie believed that the public library "outranks any other one thing that a community can do to help its people."\* Bill Gates echoes Carnegie's belief that healthy public libraries are critical to the success of our society.

\*Geoffrey Nunberg, "Will Libraries Survive?" *American Prospect* 41 (November/December 1998), pp. 16-23.

- E-mail and automated phone notification of reserved or overdue materials
- Self-check out and automated check in of materials at the book drop
- Seminars that tie technology to traditional library services (e.g., Internet homework for kids; genealogical research on the Web)
- Technology used to provide job training and assessment, teach citizenship and English as a second language, and connect to distance learning classes
- More fee-based or value-added services that are outside traditional library roles and budgets
- Staff who are assigned as personal research assistants to individuals or businesses needing fee-based research
- Electronic access to the library's online reference, catalog, and other digital resources 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

In the future, libraries will be expected to provide personalized services, such as book-of-the-month club of favorite authors, travel packs for vacations, homework kits, etc., automatically shipped to the customer's home in response to an online request.

Libraries will have strong collections of print and electronic materials that can be used within the library, but will also offer remote access to owned or shared electronic resources over the Internet. They will network, share access costs, and specialize in subject areas in order to stretch the library budget.

### Electronic books

The idea of the portable, interactive electronic book has been around since the 1960s when Alan Kay articulated the idea of the dynabook. Thirty years later, actual electronic books began appearing on the market. Electronic books are the size of a book and are created in computer-readable formats to read CD-ROMS or disks. If the content is downloaded from books that are in the public domain, such as the Library of Congress' Project Gutenberg, the authors need not be reimbursed for each copy made. The e-books hold approximately 1,500 pages of text, which can be expanded with a memory card. Content is not always transferable from one e-book to another.

Although some libraries are experimenting with e-books, the cost is prohibitive at a large scale because of licensing requirements. If the library wants multiple copies of a bestseller, it pays licensing fees for each e-book provided to each reader. In addition to paying the licensing fees, the library must provide the hardware to read the e-book. Older books are available in electronic format only if the publisher is still in business and has archived the book in the appropriate format to be downloaded to the end user.

Because it is hard to read type on a computer screen, most people print anything longer than 500 words. Reading books in reflected light with the 100:1 contrast of print on paper is much easier than reading in transmitted light with a 10:1 contrast. Printing out a typical 300-page e-book costs about \$10 to \$20, depending upon royalties and other costs. The result will be 300 pages of unbound paper that cannot be circulated to another reader. Although printing books on demand locally could offset some of the expenses of interlibrary loans, the electronic book is not a panacea for the library budget, because licensing and paper costs exceed most book budgets.\*

\*Walt Crawford, "Paper Persists: Why Physical Library Collections Still Matter," *Online* 22 (January/February 1998), pp. 42-44.

### BODIES: LIBRARIANS AS INFORMATION NAVIGATORS

The qualifications for librarians are changing. Librarians must now be information navigators, database creators, marketers, telecommunications experts, electronic licensing managers, computer technicians, webmasters, and business plan developers. They must be able to provide outreach services ranging from storytelling at a neighborhood daycare center to managing the virtual library. Librarians will continue the roles of teaching, guiding, and interpreting information, regardless of the diversity of the format. Meanwhile, their titles will occasionally

change to classifications such as network administrator, webmaster, cybrarian, information mediator, or personal consultant.

The demand for career librarians, in the private as well as the public sector, is going up, according to Linda McKell, president of Advanced Information Management, a headhunting firm for librarians.<sup>10</sup> Librarians, who have traditionally found jobs in public, school, or academic libraries, are now being offered high-paying positions with information and technology companies. Local governments have to rethink their pay scales and look at external markets rather than just at the neighboring communities' salaries.

At the same time, because of the large number of librarians approaching retirement age, the closing of library schools in the 1970s and 1980s, and the fact that in many libraries salaries are not competitive, a shortage of qualified librarians is developing. There are not enough new graduates to fill the rising need for trained information navigators.

Budgeting for the training of library staff is essential. Good librarians will be learning throughout their careers, and employees who do not have the advantage of training will rapidly fall behind in technological expertise.

Librarians cannot be replaced with bookstore clerks and volunteers. There is no current or future computer tool that makes librarians obsolete. Walt Crawford affirms, "Professional librarians provide the backbone for effective, extended library services, from reference to outreach to collection development and maintenance. A collection of services without a librarian navigator is a false economy."<sup>11</sup>

### BUILDINGS: THE LIBRARY AS "PLACE"

The 1990s have seen a resurgence of interest in main libraries, large central libraries that bring together materials, services, and special collections in very special places, often referred to as "signature" or "heritage" buildings. These libraries are making people say "Wow," because they are bold, exciting, and interesting, but also because they are so heavily used as libraries and as community meeting places. The opening of a new main library almost guarantees the doubling of library visits overnight, not only from people in the community but also from tourists, who love to visit libraries.

A community's library makes a statement about that community and its commitment to culture and learning. Libraries have become the community's "living room," its welcoming showplace and symbol of taste, with space for everyone.

If the central library has become the community's "living room," the neighborhood library has become its "front porch." A new or renovated branch library in a neighborhood can inspire other forms of renewal.

## A Community Asset

Many downtown libraries, in cities like San Francisco, Seattle, Nashville, Vancouver, and Memphis, have been ranked with retail and entertainment complexes as strong redevelopment anchors. They are being tied to convention centers or children's museums to provide a new synergy downtown. Historic downtown libraries are often in excellent locations to anchor new development projects. Locating a site for a new downtown public library has become an important economic development decision in most communities, because the traffic will follow and other development will cluster around the central library building. Charleston's new main library opened in 1998 and already new residential and retail projects have followed, revitalizing downtown's Calhoun Street.<sup>12</sup>

The new Vancouver Public Library has 19 successful retail shops in its Library Promenade, including restaurants, a florist, a yogurt shop, a mail and copy outlet, a daycare center, a smoke shop, a bank ATM, a card and gift shop, a bookstore, and an auto-detail shop that services patrons' cars while they are at the library.

Glen E. Holt, executive director of the St. Louis Public Library System and a former urban history and urban studies professor, quantified the economic benefit of public libraries. His recent case study of library users in St. Louis found that the \$15 million that taxpayers spent each year on library services resulted in \$67 million in economic benefits to the community.<sup>13</sup>

Major American cities are building new libraries. During the 1990s, Chicago, San Antonio, Phoenix, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Denver constructed new central libraries (see sidebar on page 6). New York Public Library opened its new Science, Business, and Industry Library and restored its main library's Rose Reading Room. Cleveland Public Library added a 10-story wing to its central library, and Multnomah County Library in Portland, Oregon, underwent a major renovation. Chicago opened 18 new or renovated branches and has another 20 projects under construction or in planning. Philadelphia is doing a \$50 million overhaul of the city's 52-branch Free Library System, and Los Angeles is upgrading, renovating, expanding, or replacing 59 branch libraries.

## New Space for New Services

The public libraries of the new century will serve traditional needs, but will add many non-traditional services. Los Angeles and St. Louis are adding teen rooms and teen clubs to their new and renovated libraries. Most new libraries include bookstores, coffee shops, exhibit space, computer training labs, auditoriums, and enough meeting rooms to create mini-conference centers. Library cafés are offering light breakfast and lunch and limitless cups of cof-

## Internet access policies for public libraries

A review of Internet policies currently in place for public libraries throughout the United States and Canada reveals that they range from simple two-paragraph statements to more complex two- to three-page policies. Internet access policies for public libraries include three general areas: 1) who can access and when; 2) safeguarding hardware and software; and 3) content-based regulations.

**Who can access the Internet, and when.** Because demand can outweigh the supply of computers, sign-up sheets and time limitations are frequently employed, and access to the Web may be limited to certain hours of the day. Although public libraries generally do not charge users for access to the Internet, a public library may consider charging users for additional services, such as printing, to offset costs. Policies concerning access by children may be considered, such as mandating parental supervision or parental consent, and informing adults and children alike of their responsibilities through access agreements signed by users.

**Safeguarding the hardware and software.** An Internet access policy should prohibit users from deleting or modifying software, from installing their own software, or from using the computer for any purpose other than "surfing" the Web.

**Regulating content.** A federal court in Virginia found in 1998 that restricting all users from accessing certain sites is an impermissible restriction on free speech (*Mainstream Loudoun v. Board of Trustees of the Loudoun County Library*, 24 F Supp. 2d 552 [E.D. Va. 1998]). However, the court in *Mainstream Loudoun* stated that installing "blocking" software on computers used exclusively by children, or the use of "blocking" software that could be turned off by adults, would be permissible. Privacy screens could also be used to prevent the inadvertent exposure of "obscene" materials to children.

**Resources.** The American Library Association provides online information on establishing an Internet access policy at [www.ala.org/alaorg/oif/internet.html](http://www.ala.org/alaorg/oif/internet.html) and information on children's use of the Web at [www.ala.org/parentspage/greatsites/guide.html](http://www.ala.org/parentspage/greatsites/guide.html).

The Lake Oswego, Oregon, Public Library, lists the Internet access policies of 125 public libraries in the United States, through 1997 ([www.ci.oswego.or.us/library/poli.htm](http://www.ci.oswego.or.us/library/poli.htm)).

Safekids.com provides information regarding the use of the Web by children, as well as links to other sites and resources.

American Civil Liberties Union information on "blocking" software in public libraries can be accessed at [www.aclu.org/issues/cyber/hmcl.html](http://www.aclu.org/issues/cyber/hmcl.html).

Source: Kerry P. Ezrol and Michael D. Cirullo, Jr., "Developing an Internet Access Policy for Your Public Library," *Quality Cities* (March/April 1999), pp. 31-32.

### The role of the central library in economic development

Through the last two decades, as old inner cities witnessed the exit of big corporations, banks, department stores, and high-class boutique retailers, some civic leaders and elected officials began to look at old central city libraries, art museums, and historical societies as urban assets—to be developed, expanded, or built anew.

In many cities, central libraries have become part of a local renaissance. Here are some U.S. central library highlights:

- San Antonio, Texas' new enchilada-red central library and garage was used to reclaim and encourage redevelopment in a run-down tenement and warehouse district.
- Chicago, Illinois, built a \$200,000,000 central library to reclaim what for a hundred years had been the city's largest red-light district.
- Columbus, Ohio, quadrupled the size of the old Carnegie Central Library, with an underground parking lot. It reopened almost simultaneously with a new downtown shopping mall only a few blocks away. At the same time, the library board bought a block of apartments adjacent to the new library, anticipating both future expansion and possible multiple-use and private-public development.
- Denver, Colorado, quadrupled the size of its central library and made it into a new civic complex, more than tripling visitation and outdrawing every other government building or museum in the complex.
- San Francisco, California, developed a completely new high-technology library-as-information-center that became both public service point and tourist destination.
- In Fayetteville (Columbia County), North Carolina, the remodeled library became the chief traffic generator in the downtown area.

Central libraries promote economic development in three ways:

- By serving as anchors for retail, educational, civic and residential development, like the central libraries in Nashville, Tennessee, and Rochester, New York.
- By serving as destinations for families throughout the region, which is the way that both Toledo, Ohio, and Denver, Colorado think about their central library.
- By serving as symbols or "signature buildings" to attract out-of-town visitors, like the new central libraries in San Francisco and Los Angeles.

Source: Glen E. Holt, Executive Director, St. Louis Public Library.

fee, cappuccino, and latte. In Chicago's Beyond Words Café, the café's caterer teaches weekly cooking classes using cookbooks from the library's collection.

Tomorrow's library buildings must be more flexible and efficient in adapting to new technology. The design cannot interfere with good library service. If the staff cannot efficiently operate the building and provide excellent customer service, the building is not successful. Hiring library building consultants to help plan the functionality of the building, plan for good air quality, and assure low energy consumption is a wise economic decision in the long run.

Service is the key element in all space planning. The floor plan should make sense. A new user should be able to figure out how to use the library within a few minutes of entering the building. Libraries can no longer afford to hire staff to sit at the front door and give directions; the architecture and signage accomplish that purpose. Service desks should be visible, shelving logically arranged, and staff work spaces adjacent to the departments they service, in order to make the most efficient and economical use of library space.

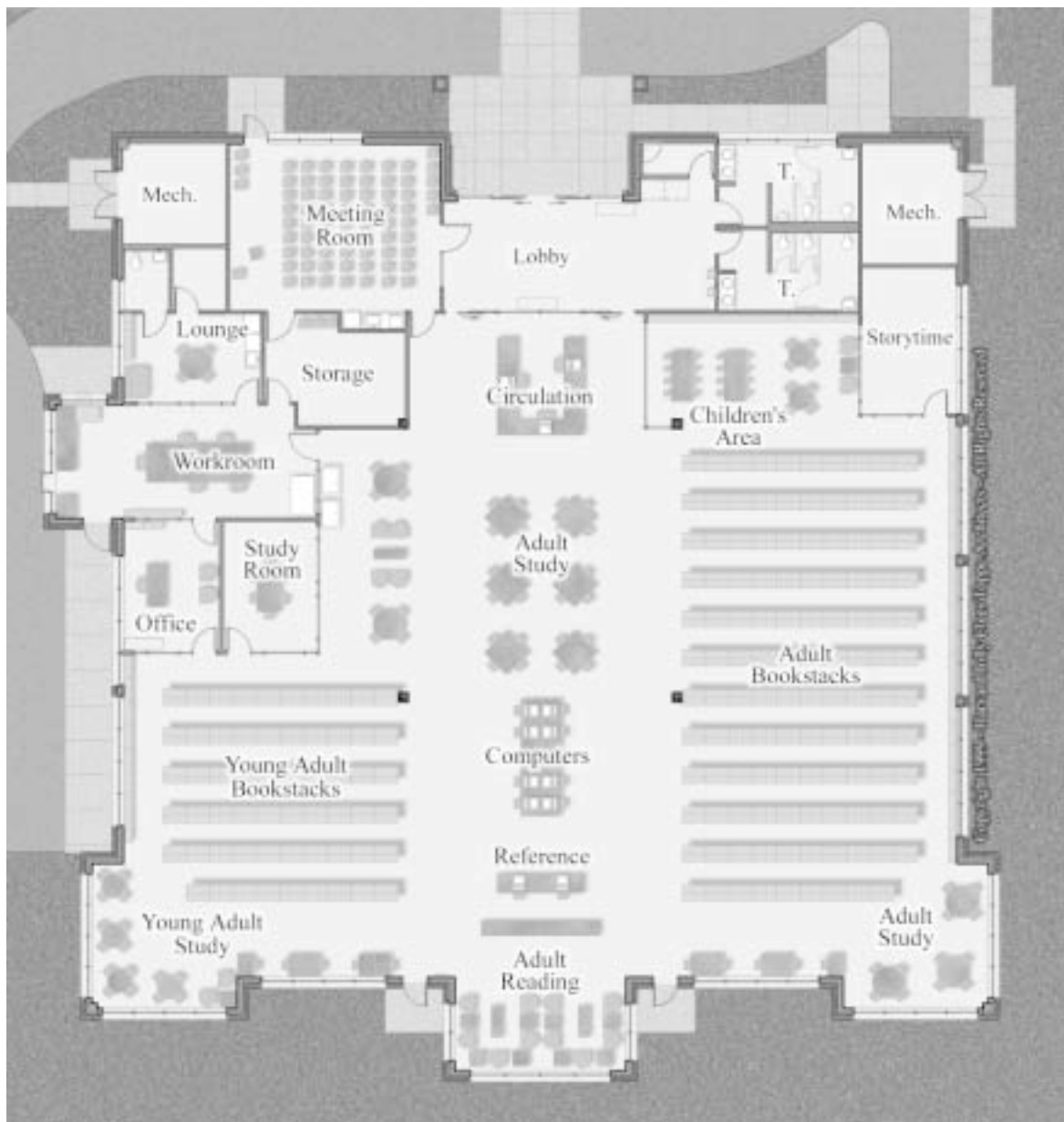
The building should be welcoming, for children and adults. Architects are integrating color, plants, and furnishings to delight the eye and make the user feel at home. Public art projects enhance the architecture and inspire enthusiastic debate.

A new library must be designed so that future changes, such as rewiring, new equipment, and reconfiguring spaces can be done as quickly and economically as possible, without disrupting library service. Reader areas, staff offices, and book stacks must be designed to be interchangeable, as technology and services change. Library departments may be designed without walls, so that they can be consolidated or expanded into contiguous areas. The library's telecommunications, ceiling systems, utilities, millwork, and exterior and interior walls must be designed to meet current and future needs with minimal change, through the use of cable trays, in-floor conduit, redundant wiring, and planning for more power/data jacks than anyone thinks can ever be used.

As reference books are converted to online resources, the floor space used for shelving becomes space for computer workstations. The wiring must be in place to handle unknown future requirements. Libraries built even a decade ago could not anticipate today's demand for public Internet access. Floors need to be reinforced to handle today's heavy book stacks, but also tomorrow's compact shelving.

Libraries must include more community meeting spaces. As people interact on the Internet, they want to come together to have meetings and discussion groups. The demand for community space is increasing because of growth in distance education, home schooling, group study projects, tutoring, life-long learning, interactive projects, and teamwork.





*A prototype flexible library floorplan. Reprinted by permission of Harvard Jolly Clees Toppe Architects.*

Public library meeting rooms are neutral, non-commercial, common ground where people can meet without making a statement based upon the location used. Going to the library is not just an educational or recreational experience; for many people, it is a social event.

Libraries must also provide pockets of quiet spaces for those who want to read or study. They may be planned so that some areas, such as computer labs or study rooms, can be used after hours. Various areas of the library must be accessible when other areas are closed. The library and its surrounding areas

must be safe for staff and customers during all hours of the day and night.

Communities will be wise to plan libraries that provide more space than their current facilities, that can be used flexibly for ever-changing collections, meeting rooms, research, study, children's programs, virtual services, and technology. Communities that are accustomed to replacing their library furnishings and equipment every 30 to 50 years will find that they need to plan for 3- to 5-year technical obsolescence. Providing library service will cost more, not less, in the future.

### BEYOND: PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE NEW CENTURY

In most communities, there are partners willing to share the higher costs of tomorrow's libraries. The public library systems of many large communities are being revitalized with strong political support and generous financial endowment from public and private sources. Private sector companies are sponsoring special programs or services in the library community in exchange for publicity. They are donating computer labs, funding career centers, providing telecommunications discounts, installing high speed modems, sponsoring reading programs, and providing staff to train or serve as programs volunteers.

Partnerships are being extended in large and small ways.

- In Miami, the Florida Marlins baseball team provided 5,000 pairs of tickets to any child who read ten books in the summer reading program.
- The Clearwater (Philadelphia) Phillies provided bookmarks with player photos and library hours and locations for the Clearwater Public Library System. Special Data Processing, a private firm, partnered with the Clearwater Public Library System to fund a Reading Is Fundamental program at two local schools.
- The North Richland Hills (Texas) Public Library partners with the school district to provide GED, English as a second language, adult education, and literacy classes in the library's adult learning center.
- A Starbucks coffee shop located in the renovated Multnomah County Library sponsored a "Better Latte than Never" campaign to get customers to return their overdue library materials. They mailed 65,000 postcards promising a free hot beverage to those who returned their overdue library books, and had 35,000 books returned.
- The public library in Cobleigh, a small town in northern Vermont, initiated a coalition of family service providers to build its programs for children of rural families.
- Libraries in many communities partner with area hospitals to provide "Born to Read" kits to mothers of newborns. The kits include a "Born to Read" bib or T-shirt, books, and a parenting bibliography.
- City police officers in St. Petersburg, Florida, read stories to children in daycare centers as part of the police department's partnership with the public library.
- With a start-up grant from the Petroleum Violation Escrow Account administered by the U.S. Department of Energy, the Oceanside (California) Public Library established a community computer center that is open seven days a week to provide computer skills and distance learning for residents. For registered telecommuters, the center provides work cubicles, computers equipped with standard business software, telephones, a fax machine, a printer, a photocopier, and typewriters, for up to eight hours per day.

#### Partnering for summer space

Many county libraries offer summer reading programs for youth. However, the popularity of these programs often strains their resources. At the same time, libraries in schools are closed, and their materials are unavailable to children for the entire summer.

The public school system and the public library in Henrico County, Virginia, formed a partnership to solve both problems. The school system agreed to open 38 elementary school libraries for a limited number of hours, two days a week, during the summer. The county promoted the summer school library hours by contacting daycare centers and school associations. Title VI funding paid for one library media specialist to staff each of the 38 school libraries. The total budget for the program, including salaries and supplies, was \$34,300.

The Henrico partnership was a 1998 winner of a National Association of Counties Achievement Award.

Alliances are being formed between libraries and museums, schools, universities, media, corporations, shopping centers, state and federal government agencies, and other libraries to seek funding and provide specialized services to specific user groups. These alliances sometimes bring additional job titles into the library's realm of responsibility, as museum curators, teachers, or social service counselors must also be hired.

Libraries are sharing their facilities with police stations, school and junior college libraries, career centers, museums, and legal and medical libraries. These innovative alliances are frequently funded by grants from federal or state governments, nonprofit organizations, philanthropic foundations, private corporations, or wealthy citizens who see the synergistic possibilities of cooperation. Because public libraries serve the entire spectrum of ages, religions, races, and economic levels, and because librarians are adept at designing innovative outreach programs with measurable outputs, libraries are trusted as partners.

Tomorrow's libraries will be partnering with businesses that some might see as competitors, such

as bookstores, video rental outlets, and information brokers. As colleagues and partners, these agencies improve service to community customers by referring them to each other's collections and extended services.

Local "friends of the library" groups and library foundations are expected to become stronger in the next few years. While many local government departments have advisory commissions, only the library has a voluntary citizen support group, such as friends of the library, not created or endorsed by elected officials. As libraries meet more budget and financial constraints, these groups are becoming more politically active.<sup>14</sup>

Public libraries, which have never generated much revenue for their services, are now seeking ways to improve their financial situation. Although user fees for basic library services are not legal in most areas, many libraries charge fees for computer-generated literature searches, copies of computer printouts, duplication services, and room rentals. In many of the newer libraries with more meeting rooms, the income from room rentals has become a prime revenue source. Usually, higher rates are charged to commercial groups, reduced fees are made available to non-profits, and rental fees are totally waived for library or government-sponsored programs. The costs of scheduling, setting up, and managing these public spaces must also be taken into consideration.

While some libraries have out-sourced their automation systems and cataloging for many years, a few communities are now considering outsourcing the management of all library services. Library Systems & Services, LLC (LSSI), a group of former library directors, has signed contracts for the operation of the public libraries in Riverside County and Calabasas, California, and Jersey City, New Jersey. Although LSSI has won praise for the improvements it has made to the Riverside libraries, outsourcing has not been without problems: Two of Riverside's 25 branches have pulled out of the system. Jersey City's controversial contract was contested by the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees union. The New Jersey superior court ruled that the board contracted out the library's operation without proper public input. LSSI contracts require the local government to pay a management fee of 2 to 3 percent of the library's annual budget.

All partnerships need to make sense within the library's mission—they need to help make the traditional services of the library more available to the community and they should not waste library resources.

The following section provides one example of how a library system can evolve to preserve and enhance its traditional role in a changing environment, largely through the help of partnerships with other organizations.

### Libraries and the digital divide

According to a 1999 National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) report, many people access the Internet at libraries for important, life-sustaining purposes such as job-hunting, education, and locating health information.

Gaps exist in household access to the Internet between whites, Hispanics, and blacks. Libraries play a critical role in reducing these gaps. According to the NTIA report, 60 percent of Hispanics who access the Internet get access through libraries, and rural African Americans use the library more than any other group.

The report shows other gaps, including differences based on income (persons with incomes above and below \$75,000), family status (two-parent versus single-parent households), and location (urban versus rural areas). The report also found that the greatest lack of Internet access was in rural areas and the rural South.

Several public libraries have pioneered services to reduce the gap between the information rich and the information poor:

- The Seattle Public Library has provided public access to the Internet since 1993. It targets patron groups that might not otherwise have access to the Internet: senior citizens, downtown homeless people, job seekers, arts and social service organizations, African-American service organizations, and visually impaired citizens. The library's public access terminals are available in 20 neighborhood locations and two housing projects.
- The Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County (North Carolina) directs "Charlotte's Web," a regional community computer network whose mission is to ensure that all citizens have access to educational information and communications resources. Citizens can reach Charlotte's Web through 74 public access terminals located in local library branches, neighborhood youth and senior centers, school classrooms, school libraries, health care facilities, and shelters.
- The Capitan (New Mexico) Public Library established an Internet workshop and global connectivity for its rural population of 600.
- The West Oakland branch of the Oakland (California) Public Library sponsors the CyberSurfers' Club for neighborhood youth. Members of the club come to the library to learn how to do online research, communicate with other youth across the nation, create animated stories or books, participate in authorized youth-oriented chat rooms, and in general learn to navigate the Internet.

NTIA's 1999 report "Falling Through the Net: Defining the Digital Divide" and other reports are available at <http://www.ntia.doc.gov/ntiahome/digitaldivide/>.

### ST. LOUIS PUBLIC LIBRARY: A CASE STUDY IN PARTNERSHIPS

*The following description of the growth and partnering activities of the St. Louis (Missouri) Public Library was written by Dr. Glen E. Holt, Executive Director of the St. Louis Public Library. Dr. Holt holds an MA and PhD from the University of Chicago in history and urban studies, and was a full-time professor of urban history and urban studies at Washington University in St. Louis, an academic administrator at the University of Minnesota, and for more than 20 years a consultant to government agencies, foundations, historical societies, museums, and libraries. This summary is drawn from a much longer paper, "Public Library Partnerships: Mission-Driven Tools for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Success," which Dr. Holt wrote in his capacity as a senior networker for the Bertelsmann Foundation, Gütersloh, Germany. The full version of the paper can be found on the Bertelsmann Foundation Web site at [www.stiftung.bertelsmann.de/english/publika/download/index.htm](http://www.stiftung.bertelsmann.de/english/publika/download/index.htm).*

In 1987, the St. Louis Public Library (SLPL) in St. Louis, Missouri, had been living off exactly the same income for 17 years. In the meantime, inflation had eroded 58 percent of its spending power. Here are the elements of the strategy the city used to bring about a renaissance in its library system.

First, the library was able to win two tax elections—in 1988 and 1994. An important element in these victories was a fund established to pay for a political campaign to pass these referenda. (Among the major contributors to the fund was Anheuser-Busch. Headquartered in St. Louis and an active contributor to the city's cultural and educational life, the company was convinced to contribute to the fund even though it meant that taxes on its considerable property holdings in the city would be raised.)

These revenue increases took the library system's operating income needle off empty. The first election gave it the ability to hire a few critical new staff members, start a major investment in computers and networks, and paint up and fix up its facilities. The second election in 1994 provided about \$5 million a year to invest in capital developments. Of that annual total, SLPL immediately allocated \$1 out of every \$5 of the new dollars into materials—books, magazines and electronic materials, including computer software. The new investment brought the materials budget (including soft-money grants) to about 19 percent of the operations budget.

Second, beginning in the late 1980s, SLPL has been investing between \$500,000 and \$800,000 annually in computers and networks. That investment includes a sizeable portion for staff computers—to increase their productivity and thereby hold down staff costs. The technological goal is to develop a reliable computer system as close to cutting edge as possible without moving to the bleeding edge.

Third, most of the increase from the 1994 election—over \$4,000,000 annually—went to reconstruct the system's facilities. The branches were improved first, to build and hold the support of the neighborhood voters who had raised their taxes to increase the library's operating income. The library's management also wanted to build its experience and credibility in handling capital projects before making a major effort on the central library. To date the neighborhood facilities improvement program includes the following:

- Two new mini-branches in major strip shopping malls
- Two new youth-service branches in remodeled and/or enlarged libraries in neighborhoods inhabited by large numbers of at-risk youth
- Purchase and remodeling of a 1955 three-story bank building into a 38,000-square-foot regional branch
- An agreement to develop a 25,000-square-foot regional branch in a new city parking garage in a neighborhood that has been served by a 7,800-square-foot branch.

By early 2001, all but four branches will have been rehabilitated. These improvements have brought exciting results. Even as city population dropped from 394,000 to about 330,000, a decline of 16 percent, total library circulation increased from 800,000 to over 2.5 million annually; per capita circulation rose from 3.8 to 7.2 per city resident; and visitation at all library locations is up from 750,000 persons to 1.75 million annually. Other typical library performance measures have increased in proportion.

### Building a New Central Library

A major objective in the rebuilding of St. Louis Public Library has been the renewal of the central library and its services.

**The vision.** The first step in building a new central library is to envision a different future—whether as an out-of-town visitor attraction or a high-volume regional information and reading destination where folks will want to come time after time. SLPL wants to double central library visitation to more than one million people annually, attracting about 50 percent from places other than the city, with perhaps 20 percent of those from outside the region. The high traffic generated also will help catalyze commercial and residential settlement in the central library's immediate vicinity.

**The space.** The second step is to obtain space to implement the vision. Because of the cost and the numbers of decision-makers involved, this task is never easy. SLPL made its key space-to-grow deci-

sion in January 1996 when the board purchased a three-story, 168,000-square-foot bank building just across the street from the original 1912 central library.

The old library is a magnificent Beaux Arts Italianate “people’s palace” with nearly 200,000 square feet of gross space, of which only 97,000 square feet is usable for library functions. The rest is beautiful hallways, corridors, and a huge, now outmoded, built-in, air-handling system that extends from the attic to seven “air chambers” in the basement, connecting every room in the building through brick-lined air passages.

The bank building, built in two sections in 1968 and 1982, was purchased in the trough of the real estate market for \$5,300,000. With a large portion of the building tenanted, as it is now, SLPL nets about \$500,000 annually, so the building is paying for itself. Meanwhile, the central library has begun to shift its functions gradually into the new building. The purchase of the bank building gave the central library room to grow and develop relatively inexpensively. The new building also has 309 parking spaces, 262 of them in a covered underground garage.

**Collections and technology.** Along with space, other standard library development tools are collections and technology. To implement its vision with the tools at hand, SLPL developed an implementation strategy that includes seven steps.

**Focus on children.** First, the library planners, like those at McDonalds, ask, “What will attract the children?” because children guide their parents to family destinations. And what attracts kids is computers with age-appropriate software, homework help, new book collections to check out and take home, and special programs like the Baseball Cardinals partnership that keeps kids involved (see page 13), and Club Read that attracts pre-teens and teens to the library with big incentives.

In the new central library, the Kids Computer and Education Center will have 13,000 square feet for a new kids destination, a place that will cause the school buses to line up outside. The central library will also have the system’s largest collections of children’s materials, plus space to do all kinds of children’s programming.

**Bring patrons downtown.** Second, SLPL planners ask, “What will attract our best customers downtown?” The answer is to offer the biggest collection of new best-sellers, videos, and audio to be found in the region—in a bookstore setting, with a full-scale restaurant, with extensive catering facilities, in the same building. The new central library will not only have many current popular materials, but will organize programs and parties around those materials.

The lecture series featuring best-selling authors, now in its third year, is a highly visible tool in drawing the best reading customers downtown. Some of

the most popular programs have drawn crowds too large for the current downtown library space. The new space will provide room to showcase national and international writers. In short, it will be an attraction because it will be able to act like one.

Moreover, the new central library will attract customers by bringing most of its books out of hiding. Currently nearly 80 percent of all central books and periodicals are in closed stacks. The new space will allow all books to be brought out except those that need to stay under lock and key and things that are called for so seldom that they deserve to be in closed storage. The new space will let the library arrange its materials in “crown jewel collections” so that visitors can easily find their favorite cookbook, exactly the right law book, or the best new history of American Indians.

**Increase online use.** SLPL will attract virtual customers as central library visitors as well. Thirteen percent of reserves and 13 percent of document delivery already is ordered virtually. The virtual reference service answers hundreds of questions monthly. To attract virtual users downtown, the new central library will provide the latest Internet technology. Central will soon have 45 Internet and reference-material computers—the largest adult computer lab in the system, staffed by skilled online searchers and a group of highly trained searcher-assistants who can quickly meet user information needs.

Every day SLPL is adding to the virtual sources mounted on the city’s Web site, Electronic City Hall. This site, maintained by SLPL, has all ordinances, including the most current, and all license applications; a huge St. Louis-based local history and genealogical index; a Kid’s Zone; Homework Help; and many more features.

Virtual users tend to become library visitors because they often need the help of librarian-searchers to open up new information topics, and they look to their “personal librarians” to help them to make new information associations. They also need paper materials to complete their searches, and that also brings them to central or to the closest branch library.

**Create an attractive venue.** The new central library will have about 415 parking spaces, more than a hundred new comfortable places just to sit down, multiple meeting rooms, and classrooms. The central library will become a set of safe, secure, well-furnished research and meeting venues for those wanting the services of a library or information location.

**Create a center for business development.** The model for SLPL’s new center for business development is the library in Newcastle upon Tyne, England, which has a one-stop shop for those looking for information on business. The center will feature both online searching and an abundance of special business materials. The new unit will require the joining of much of the

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business, science, and technology department with the materials and staff helping users find educational and job opportunities in the adult education department.

**Offer interactive exhibits.** SLPL will give increasing attention to the creation of the “museum of the information future.” It will build this museum from its own collections and from the collections of regional museums as well as from national museums like the Smithsonian Institution, which is developing a strong affiliates program.

**Extend library hours.** Resources will be reallocated to extend the hours at the central library. Morning usage has declined throughout the system, except for retirees and daycare centers, and pressure for more evening hours is growing. SLPL surveys show that many families would come downtown to use the library during early evening hours. Many business professionals would stay downtown to attend classes on information management that would help them advance and succeed in their jobs. American lifestyles are changing. Library operating hours and programs have to change to match those lifestyles.

**Funding.** The creation of the new SLPL central library will use \$10 to \$12 million in public money and an estimated \$12 to \$15 million in private funding based on recent fund-raising experience. Private funding is national as well as regional and local. For example, The Gates Library Initiative (see sidebar on page 3) will pay for the new adult computer lab in the central library.

### Forming Partnerships

Partnerships have played a leading role in the growth of SLPL over the past decade. The library has formed partnerships in at least seven distinct areas. These are summarized below with examples to illustrate how the partnerships operate.

**Training.** Training staff to become more adept at the skills necessary for outstanding customer and support services is a necessity in modern libraries. Some U.S. library training budgets now approximate the 5 percent of gross salary that many North American corporations are spending on this effort.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the public wants libraries to expand training provided to patrons, especially training to find and manage electronic information available through networked computers. To improve staff training and training for patrons, SLPL had to obtain training skills not available on staff. For in-service, organizational training, it turned to a private region-wide, leadership-training program. For technology training, library administrators contracted with the area community college to provide computer hardware

and software trainers. The use of these trainers brought knowledgeable and timely instruction without increasing permanent staff costs.

**Funding.** The basic theme of library funding partnerships is always the same: the institution obtains new resources, and the donor gains association with an effective, high visibility, public-service organization working to improve the quality of community life. Private sector donors like to fund innovation, especially when it involves market groups in which the company has particular interests. In public libraries anywhere, library good works and solidly based appeals can attract private-sector support. And donors can be transformed into philanthropic partners, involved in making sure that the donation succeeds.

At SLPL, funding partnerships are an important financial tool. Among the private sector organizations that have contributed funds to support library programs are the following:

- Anheuser-Busch Companies, headquartered in St. Louis, donated a total of \$50,000 to a fund that would pay for a political campaign to win two referenda on tax increases, and donated another \$50,000 to underwrite a major new all-year initiative for African-American programming. The company’s community relations executive shared in the responsibilities for organizing the program.
- The St. Louis office of the accounting firm of Price-Waterhouse donated the services of one of its certified public accountant (CPA) consultants to take over management of the SLPL finance office during its critical transition to a new computerized accounting system. For a period of more than a year, the Price-Waterhouse consultant worked as an SLPL executive staff member while being paid by his employer. By the time the library had completed the transition with the hiring of a highly qualified CPA as its new chief financial officer, the Price-Waterhouse in-kind time donation amounted to over \$100,000.
- In 1992 Commerce Bankshares donated to the library a vacant lot adjacent to its major north side branch for a new branch library. Over the next year, Commerce modernized the adjacent bank branch, restoring the structure’s historic interior to its original condition when it opened as a neighborhood savings-and-loan bank 70 years earlier. A parking lot shared by the library and bank symbolized for the public the cooperative relationship between the two institutions. Over the next decade, the Commerce Bankshares-SLPL partnership bloomed. On several occasions, the corporation’s philanthropic foundation funded library programs: an expansion of beginning literacy and reading programs for area daycare centers, travel and honoraria for well-

known authors to speak at the library, and special African-American children's programs. It also came to involve discussions between the officials of the two institutions about how they could work together to further improve the neighborhoods where they both had locations. This public-private partnership became a rich synergism in the true meaning of that word.

**Information dissemination/development.** In 1995, representatives of Gale, a major U.S. publisher of reference tools, asked SLPL and the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh (CLP) to enter into a partnership to develop a new popular-trivia CD-ROM reference database for the public library market. During this partnership, as part of their regular reference work, SLPL and CLP reference staff verified the correctness of hundreds of trivia "facts." For the contributed time of staff, Gale gave SLPL full acknowledgment in the publication and the publicity surrounding its issue and several free CD versions of the final product to use on its reference-material computers. In the process, work that the SLPL reference staff does locally on an ongoing basis helped create a nationally-distributed reference product needed by other libraries.<sup>16</sup> It was a partnership in which all three partners won in the enhancement of their organizational image and/or financially.

### **Aldermen and their staff called library staff to thank them for making their job easier.**

In 1993 SLPL and the neighboring St. Louis County Library extended a joint video checkout policy into a full-scale reciprocal-lending agreement. The policy allows cardholders in either system to check out items from the other system and to return items from both systems to any location in either system. The system whose users check out and/or lose the most materials has to pay the other library's cost of lost materials and 25 cents per item for all items checked out by users from the other system in excess of the numbers borrowed by patrons from the other system. Both boards thereby can say truthfully that they are not "giving away" materials to another system without getting something in return, and they are not paying for the books lost by users from the other system. Paying the financial "balance" between the two systems has never amounted to more than \$25,000 annually, a small figure within annual budgets of \$20 million for each system.

In a partnership with several city agencies, SLPL maintains the Electronic City Hall on the SLPL Internet Web site. The page contains key-word searchable full text of all city ordinances passed by the board of aldermen since 1994, field searchable

indexing to ordinances going back to 1990 and (by the end of 1999) a subject index of all city ordinances before then going back to the beginning of the city in the 1820s. Electronic City Hall contains key-word searchable full text of the *Revised Code of the City of St. Louis* and the *Charter of the City of St. Louis*.<sup>17</sup> It also provides the daily minutes of the proceedings of the board of aldermen<sup>18</sup> and all the license applications for the office of license collector. An old anti-fraud law makes it necessary to apply for all licenses in person at the license collector's office in city hall. The city license posting, however, lets each person meet all requirements before going to that city hall office. One of the most significant library contributions in mounting this material turned out to be the "reference interviews" that library staff did with agency staff and potential users about what they needed from Electronic City Hall. These discussions made the electronic materials relatively easy to use.

Along with the gratitude of users, the SLPL Electronic City Hall project had an unanticipated impact: an enormous improvement in the morale of the city staff who have to furnish these essential pieces of information to a demanding public on a day-to-day basis. Aldermen and their staff called and wrote library staff to thank them for making their job easier.

**Program development.** SLPL enjoys partnerships with many service agencies with program and staff expertise different from the library.

BJC Healthcare System, the region's largest health maintenance organization, supports a highly successful senior citizen health-information program. BJC nursing professionals supply instruction at SLPL branches, and BJC provided a donation of \$10,000 to cover printing and publicity costs. SLPL staff designed materials, used its direct mail lists to attract audiences, compiled bibliographies of materials that participants could check out, and hosted the events.

In 1994, the St. Louis Municipal Opera, or the "Muny" as it is popularly known, created "First Stage," an adjunct experimental theater group of talented young artists who would provide exciting theatrical programs to younger audiences. The Muny had the concept and the talent. It needed venues. The Muny First Stage organizers started meeting with the SLPL youth services and marketing staff, and together they created "From the Page to the Stage," a series of neighborhood theater productions that helped kids write and produce dramatic productions. As part of the program, youth actors from the Muny presented dramatic works in the intimate settings of neighborhood branch library meeting rooms. The excited and appreciative audiences for the productions usually averaged about one hundred persons, mostly youth but with parents and caregivers along as well. SLPL youth services staff researched and published bibliographies around each production. Staff also sometimes told related stories or did asso-

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ciated book talks before or after the productions. The Muny gave away free tickets to its regular productions to the neighborhood youth who participated, thereby building future audiences.

As part of its broad inner-city literacy program, the YMCA (Young Men's Christian Organization) posts volunteers at pre-natal and children's clinics to talk with low-income mothers. Each year the Y gives away about 18,000 books to such mothers and helps them start at-home programs to help their children get ready to learn to read. One YMCA program goal is to sign up each mother for a library card. The library helped plan this program and has been the Y's principal partner in it since 1993. SLPL youth services staff provide training for Y volunteer literacy trainers. The library provides card applications. The library also serves as host at many of its branches to literacy tutors helping low-income children (and sometimes their parents) as they learn to read.

**... every \$1.00 SLPL spent on media advertising brought a return of \$2.50 in donated advertising.**

**Building audiences.** In 1991, the director of SLPL called the marketing office of the St. Louis Baseball Cardinals and asked for a few tickets as premiums to help spur kids to read 15 books as part of the library's summer reading club. Out of that call has come a multi-faceted partnership: in the summer of 1999, SLPL bought \$10,000 in radio advertising on the Cardinals Sports Network. In return, the library received numerous public service announcements (PSAs) on radio and television and on the huge electronic screens during home games, several on-field appearances by library mascot Theo Thesaurus, several visits to library branches by Cardinals baseball players, Cardinal-logo merchandise like gloves and bats, and 10,000 free Cardinals tickets. The total contributed value from the Cardinals will be nearly \$120,000.

Since the Cardinals-Library partnership began, minority attendance counts at Busch Stadium games have increased. Just as kids take their parents to shopping centers and to libraries, once they get used to going to baseball games, they take their parents there, too. The library also is a winner. Through the summer of 1998, 18,000 kids participated in the library's reading club. That amounts to just under one-third of all the school-age children in St. Louis.

SLPL's connections with the St. Louis Baseball Cardinals led to another partnership with KPLR-Channel 11, a local independent channel that broadcasts most Cardinals games. The relationship began with the TV station allowing its "Kids 11" troop, a popular and talented pre-teen and teen dance group,

to appear at a SLPL giant party kicking off the annual summer reading club. The SLPL event audience—teens and pre-teens, obviously hip and savvy and just as obviously "up" on music and TV as on their support for the library—proved to be exactly the same audience that Channel 11 wanted to pull toward its own market.

As a result, Channel 11's staff created a series of contemporary PSAs promoting library programs and resources. Theo Thesaurus, the library mascot, was invited to appear at several "11 Kids" programs. Theo is overstuffed and nerdy, but he drew rave reviews when he taught the kids dance steps some of them had never seen before.

Channel 11 recognizes that SLPL has regular and stable access to an audience the communication outlet wants to reach. The library recognizes that Channel 11 has the broadcasting power to reach out and attract new audiences and to add value to relationships with continuing users that SLPL could not afford without the donation of production, talent, and broadcasting time from the television station.

The Channel 11 partnership epitomizes a set of media partnerships that SLPL has with several radio stations and some print outlets. Their contribution of production and broadcast time is quite substantial, amounting to more than \$260,000 of in-kind value annually. SLPL spends \$100,000 annually on its own paid advertising program. Because of this investment, stations that end up with unsold advertising spots give extra spots or produce and air PSAs for the library. In 1997-98, every \$1.00 SLPL spent on media advertising brought a return of \$2.50 in donated advertising.

**Research.** Applied research has grown to become a major factor in the life of SLPL, and partnerships are basic to the SLPL research effort. For its initial research projects on the demographics of the library's service population, SLPL raised funds from a third party or paid for the research out of its own operating expenses and then hired graduate students from Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville (SIUE) who worked under the supervision of their professors. The principal researchers received modest per-diem consulting fees and access to some research data.

In 1994, SLPL formed a partnership with Southern Illinois University and the Public Library Association to evaluate the economic benefits of public investment in library services. The study demonstrated that SLPL users gained \$4 in benefits for every \$1 in tax revenues the public invested in the library. This research on cost-benefit methodology for libraries is being continued in partnership with four other public library systems (Baltimore County, Maryland; Birmingham, Alabama; King County (suburban Seattle), Washington; and Phoenix, Arizona) under a \$200,000 grant from the federal Institute for Museum and Library Services.



SLPL built on its capability to undertake applied research when it negotiated a contract for a new library automation system with Data Research Associations (DRA). During the competition, SLPL insisted that one requirement in the selection was the private-sector corporation's willingness to accept the library not only as a customer but as a software development partner. The first partnership project of SLPL and DRA staff is a Web-based search platform for DRA's Classic and TAOS software. This home page and search engine is being designed especially for the use of children and for adults with low literacy skills. The principal developers of this software are three SLPL programmers and several high-level library staff led by the director of youth services, who was involved in the development of an earlier children's catalog.

SLPL also is developing a public-private research partnership with NoveList, a division of EBSCO. The first goal of this project is to improve reader's advisory services, the second goal is to develop training materials that will allow in-library trainers to train other staff members to become better reader's advisors, and the third goal is to improve NoveList, a 50,000-title computer tool that offers users an opportunity to check off some points about what kind of books they like to read. The NoveList profiler then matches key words from the criteria the readers have offered with fiction-book subject fields and key words in index fields describing the books in the NoveList database.

In dealing with all these research issues, SLPL staff again have called on SIUE faculty from sociology, economics, and psychology to aid in laying out and implementing the desired improvements. The principal research techniques will involve numerous discussion groups, formal focus groups and individual interviews with SLPL patrons who are heavy readers.

**Political alliances.** Many public libraries, especially those that are "independent library districts" need to affect the legislation that affects them. As with all partnerships or other alliances, the boards and administrative officers of libraries have to decide on the appropriateness of political activity. Board members and the executive director of SLPL have a broad mandate. Within the confines of the laws, including those defining lobbying, and individual ethics canons for elected and appointed public officials, persons associated with SLPL have been involved in several political alliances. In one, library staff helped the directors of Missouri's public libraries effect a needed change in the administration of libraries at the state level.

In another, SLPL accepted an offer from Stifel Nicholas, a stock and bond brokerage company, to lobby the Missouri General Assembly to broaden the terms of the public library bonding law. Stifel Nicholas asked that if the change were successful and the

### Training staff for partnerships

The following publications provide useful ideas for developing staff capacity to partner with outside organizations.

Urban Libraries Council, *Leading the Way: Partnering for Success* (1997).

Sandra Feinberg and Sari Feldman, *Serving Families and Children through Partnerships: A How-To-Do-It Manual for Librarians* (New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers, Inc., 1996).

Leonard Kniffel, "Corporate Sponsorship: The New Direction in Fund Raising," *American Libraries* (November 1995), pp. 545-571.

John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight, *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University, Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research, Neighborhood Innovations Network, 1993). One section deals entirely with partnership opportunities for public libraries.

library issued bonds, it would be given consideration to serve as principal bond counsel for the issue. The library board agreed, after ensuring that Stifel Nicholas would have to provide documentation that the company's issuing fees were competitive. This action was taken in open meeting and publicized with an SLPL press release. An item announcing the action appeared in the region's most prominent business weekly.

The Stifel lobbying effort was successful, with passage of the new bonding law in 1996. In July 1998, under the terms of the new law, SLPL issued \$16,500,000 in 15-year, insured, AAA-rated, general-revenue bonds with interest rates ranging from as low as 4.55 percent to as high as 5.2 percent. Stifel Nicholas served as principal bond counsel for the sale.

### Lessons for Partnership

Based on the experiences of SLPL, the following general observations can be made about successful library partnerships.

**Role of institutional leaders in forming library partnerships.** A library's institutional leaders and principal external representatives should take the lead in developing library partnerships. Through the past decade, the most significant and strategically important SLPL partnerships have been developed by those at the top of the organization: individual board members, the executive director, the principal operating officers, and the staff of the library's marketing and external relations unit.

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A rich array of partnership opportunities also have come from line staff. Serving as the library's eyes and ears in the neighborhood and specialized group constituencies with which they work, they often have access to community information not otherwise available to library policy makers. Excellent SLPL partnership opportunities have come from such organizational sources as the library's head of security (i.e., a security district involving the central library and other neighboring businesses and institutions); the head of facilities (i. e., a neighborhood redevelopment partnership); and a summer reading club partnership with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration that occurred because a youth services provider was a relative of a U.S. astronaut. In other words, almost any staff member can be a good source for a library partnership opportunity.

**Prospecting for partners.** Libraries getting into the partnership business should follow two golden rules: Know thy community, and know thy partner. Within the library organization, staff need orientation on how to prospect for partnerships. Some partnerships, especially those brought about by a federal program or initiated by a governing board or high-level managers, are intentional, some are opportunistic, some arrive through sheer serendipity. When staff think of or encounter a partnership prospect, they need to know where to communicate that information within the organization so there is personal and institutional feedback.

The Urban Libraries Council has compiled a list of pitfalls and red flags to watch for during the partner prospecting phase.<sup>20</sup> The pitfalls include "not going high enough in (the) organization, not recognizing (a) chaotic organization, not looking at real benefits for both parties (and) not getting the appropriate library staff involved."

There are two groups of red flags. The first group signals a possible wave-off from potential partners. This list includes "organization is disorganized (with) unrealistic demands or one-sided agendas." In-library red flags include these: "not clearly presenting the library's resources and expertise, lack of enthusiasm from staff who will administer or run the program (and) resistance to (the) partner."

**How to assess a partner.** Preparation for entering substantial partnerships ought to include assessment meetings where the principals who will plan and operate a possible partnership get to know each other and their respective institutional cultures. Library leaders also need to gather community opinion about their prospective partners, asking about the organization's potential, its record in cooperative efforts, and the quality of its management. Some community organizations develop a reputation for "quick dates," hit-and-run exercises in which the organization pulls out what resources it can from a

partner, puts little effort back, then walks away. Most libraries are looking for more than "quick dates" in their partnerships.

Libraries should avoid partnerships when "the potential partner has nothing to add to the relationship, the partner wants the library to do all the work [or] the library doesn't have the financial or staffing resources to commit to the partnership."<sup>21</sup> Even in the United States, with its long established tradition of volunteerism, the climate of local public opinion may not be conducive to establish some partnerships. In many communities, civic leaders, board leaders and/or philanthropic or cultural institution officials may not support library partnerships, especially those involving public-private cooperation or fund-raising.

Library partnerships work when there is good planning, when communication is regular, when someone in each organization is responsible for managing the success of the joint venture, and when the partners see themselves as stakeholders with their reputations or resources on the line. Partnerships don't work when the partnerships are set up and operated in antithesis to the conditions outlined in the previous sentence.

**The communication process.** Rules for partnership communications are as simple and straightforward as the risk is high in not establishing appropriate communication: regular telephone conversations between a partnership's principals, regular reports to each other, regular assessments to see if a changing situation calls for shifts in operation or resource allocation. Internet e-mail is opening up all kinds of cooperative communication options. Partnerships, however, are like outsourcing: Someone on the staff has to manage the relationship in order to ensure quality. Mission-and-goal-driven communication is the key.

**Planning and commitment.** Informally or formally, partnerships need to pass through a planning process. During the planning, those designated to communicate with the partner need to "relate (the partnership) to the library's strategic plan and goals, look at the real costs, identify resources and needs of each partner, divide authority and responsibility, clarify what each partner can and cannot do, learn the strengths and weaknesses of the library and partner (and) consider what it will take to make the partnership successful."<sup>22</sup>

Even small projects require the expenditure of institutional resources. As SLPL gained experience with partnerships, it became a general rule that no partnership can begin without a sign-off from one of three library services operating officers, one of three support services operating officers, or the executive director. A decade ago, when the institution was just starting its partnership program, this control was not so tight. Now, however, SLPL gets more offers to join in partnerships than it can accept.

A vast majority of these amount to little more than requests for specialized resource expenditures, not partnership opportunities. The most formal and most expensive partnerships are covered by legal contracts signed by the library director as the organization's CEO. Operating officers may sign partnership contracts in their budget domains as well.

The moment of partnership-commitment truth comes when a single question gets asked: Who will manage this partnership? At SLPL, youth services is heavily involved in partnership activities. For example, 75 percent of the director of youth services' time is committed to managing various projects. That leaves only 25 percent of her time free to act as the policy and ultimate budget officer for more than 25 employees and a total budget of over \$3 million. Two soft-money project-management assistant positions ease her administrative load. Unless SLPL raises spending on staff, however, there can be no major new youth service initiatives no matter what their value. Quality management is where good partnership intentions hit the hard wall of resource reality.

Obviously the rules of planning and committing to partnerships change with their potential size and institutional significance. Delineation of responsibilities, planning and replanning, being specific and detailed, and choosing the appropriate level of commitment are all good advice for those responsible for the success of a library partnership. In the end, these details will determine the nature of the commitment: handshake, memo or letter, formal letter of agreement, contract or, sometimes, the terms of a lengthy proposal.

**Maintaining the partnership.** Carrying out partnerships to make them successful can be complicated. The person the library charges with managing the partnership will be carrying out tasks similar to those of a grants compliance officer: managing resources, tracking events, making adjustments, celebrating success. The person that the library places in charge of a partnership, in effect, is responsible for ensuring the success of the relationship.

**Evaluation.** At SLPL hardly any activity, including partnerships, gets started without some thought about evaluation. Evaluation discussions always begin early in the consideration of a project, measurement systems are put into place, and, where needed, outside evaluators are employed. As any project, including a partnership, unfolds, its monitors apply measurements to see if it is succeeding. If it is not, efforts are made to improve partnership performance—or to cut losses before they grow.

<sup>1</sup> Walt Crawford, "Paper Persists: Why Physical Library Collections Still Matter," *Online* 22 (January/February 1998), pp. 42-44.

<sup>2</sup> *The Bowker Annual*, 43<sup>rd</sup> edition (New Providence, N.J.: R. R. Bowker, 1998), p. 521

<sup>3</sup> Mary Dempsey, "Tomorrow's Public Library: The American View," *APLIS* 11, 1 (March 1998), p. 28.

<sup>4</sup> Walt Crawford, "Paper Persists," p. 43.

<sup>5</sup> Walter Crawford and Michael Gorman, *Future Libraries: Dreams, Madness, & Reality* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1995), pp. 90-93.

<sup>6</sup> Geoffrey Nunberg, "Will Libraries Survive?" *American Prospect* 41 (November/December 1998), p. 21.

<sup>7</sup> Walt Crawford, *Being Analog: Creating Tomorrow's Libraries* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1999), p. 137.

<sup>8</sup> "The Future of Libraries," *CQ Researcher* 7,20 (May 23, 1997), p. 474.

<sup>9</sup> Nunberg, p. 19.

<sup>10</sup> "The Future of Libraries," p. 461.

<sup>11</sup> Crawford, *Being Analog...*, p. 168.

<sup>12</sup> William Fulton and Chris Jackson, "Let's Meet at the Library: It's Becoming the Most Popular Spot in Town," *Planning* (May 1999), p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> Glen E. Holt and Donald Elliott, "Proving Your Library's Worth: A Test Case," *Library Journal* 123, 18 (November 1, 1998), pp. 42-44.

<sup>14</sup> Roger L. Kemp, "A City Manager Looks at Trends Affecting Public Libraries," *Public Libraries* (March/April 1999), p. 118.

<sup>15</sup> Glen E. Holt, "Staff Training: How Much Is Enough," *Bottom Line* 9, 1 (1996), pp. 43-44.

<sup>16</sup> Gale Research, Inc., *Fast Reference Facts* (Detroit, Mich.: Gale Research, Inc., 1996).

<sup>17</sup> The St. Louis ordinances, revised code, and charter web site is <http://www.slpl.lib.mo.us/cco/index.htm>

<sup>18</sup> The board of aldermen's minutes can be found at <http://www.slpl.lib.mo.us/cco/minutes/>.

<sup>19</sup> The license collector's office Web site is at <http://www.slpl.lib.mo.us/CityHall/License/>.

<sup>20</sup> Urban Libraries Council, *Leading the Way: Partnering for Success* (1997), facilitation guide, p. 36.

<sup>21</sup> Urban Libraries Council, facilitation guide, p. 28.

<sup>22</sup> Urban Libraries Council, facilitation guide, p. 54.

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