

Introduction

In August 2023, the Somerset County Library initiated a strategic planning process to create a long-term guide for library operations.

The previous plan, from 2019-2023, focused largely on external aspects in which the organization at that time had sizable gaps – outreach and promotion of library resources were minimal, sizable gaps existed in operations between the two mainland branches, and programming was in need of development.

The Library was at that time heavily invested in navigating the impacts of two significant changes to its operations – the 2016 construction of the Crisfield Library and the 2018 formation of the Eastern Shore Library Consortium.

During the previous plan, the Library also dealt with significant impacts from COVID-19. While the Library had largely normalized services, aside from programming, by August 2020, patron usage remained depressed until the summer of 2022, when it rapidly returned to typical levels.

The Library has since significantly expanded the range of community partners that it is working with, balanced operations between the two mainland branches, and has greatly increased the range of programming.

The current plan hence focuses heavily on building and solidifying systems to allow the Library to capitalize on the advantages that it has built, establishing structural, fiscal, talent, and operational development goals in place to drive continuing improvement in the services that the Library delivers, both in Library facilities, throughout the community, and virtually.

About the Library

History

The Somerset County Library System was formed in 1967 when the Princess Anne Public Library and the Lilyan Stratton Corbin Memorial Library in Crisfield joined together under one Board of Library Trustees. Today, the system includes a third branch in Ewell.

The first library in Crisfield was organized in about 1910. In 1928, Lilyan Stratton Corbin, a native of the Crisfield area and former actress, died in an automobile accident. Her husband, Alfred O. Corbin, purchased a site on East Main Street for a new library as a memorial, and the Lilyan Stratton Corbin Memorial Library was dedicated in 1930. The present building on Collins Street opened in June 2016.

The Princess Anne Library was housed in the town's railway station from 1914 until 1959, when Mrs. Katherine Seigler and Mrs. Marie Moore donated a building on East Prince William Street. The present building on Beechwood Street was dedicated in 1988.

The Smith Island Library opened in the Ewell Elementary School in 1977 as part of a library project to provide service to the residents of Smith Island. While the school ceased operations at the end of the 2022-23 school year, Somerset County Public Schools continues to maintain the facility, with the Library as the sole tenant.

Activities

The Somerset County Library offers services six days a week to the residents of Somerset County. An up-to-date selection of more than 50,000 print and audiovisual resources is complemented by access to a wide selection of electronic databases, ebooks, and downloadable audiobooks.

Library usage has continued to increase rapidly since its apparent normalization post-COVID, with more than 60,000 visits to the three branches, 75,000 items checked out, 40,000 uses of library computers and WiFi, and 7,000 attendees at events and classes.

The Library offers a wide array of classes and events for all ages, including technology training, job resources, book discussion groups, and arts and crafts programs. Major annual events include the Summer Reading Program, Princess Anne Trunk or Treat, and Crisfield Fall Festival.

Vision, Mission, and Values Statement

Vision Statement: “The Heart of the Community”

The vision statement expresses a commitment to further and directly pursue the Library’s centrality in the community by emphasizing strengths in customer service, wide-reaching connections to both individuals and other community organizations, and the Library facilities’ role as some of a very few spaces freely available.

Mission Statement: “To connect county residents to the world by creating wide-ranging collections, classes, events, services, and spaces.”

The mission statement outlines the wide range of services that the Library provides to its community. The use of the word “connect” maintains the emphasis on the Library’s wide reach in the community as well as its personalized relationship with both individual customers and community organizations.

Core Values

- Think Global – We explore best practices and emerging services from throughout the wider world of public libraries, with particular emphasis on sharing and collaborating with other libraries in the State to come up with new and innovative ways to best serve our customers.
- Act Local – We adapt, create, and implement ideas to address the particular needs of customers in the County.
- Focus on Each Customer – We treat each customer as an individual and offer proactive customer service to address their specific needs.
- Build from Within – We are committed to developing our staff and our services to build our organization for long-term benefit to the community.

Taken together, these core values serve as anchors underpinning the way that the Library can best serve its customers. They start from the broadest view – collaborating with other public libraries on ideas, innovation, and best practices; they become local – adapting those ideas to our particular socioeconomic situation in the County; they become individualized – focusing on each particular customer; and then they become internal – focusing on how we develop the capacity to do this.

These values will shape the organizational culture by encouraging employees to participate in the wealth of professional development opportunities offered both nationally and through State and Regional libraries, while also reminding them that implementation locally is reliant on adaptation to suit local needs in both the large scale – such as collection development and design of events and classes - and the small scale – addressing individual needs in the case of one-on-one activities like technology assistance and reference questions.

PESTEL Analysis

As a public library, we have a slew of connections to other organizations, whether that be national thought leaders like the American Library Association, global content providers like Rakuten, which provides the library's eBook catalog, numerous statewide and regional library organizations, and numerous local nonprofits and governmental agencies that interact with the Library regularly when their missions overlap (or even simply because they need our meeting rooms).

Because of some of these far-reaching connections, the Library needs to maintain an astute awareness of macro-environmental factors, including:

Political Factors

- The Library is funded almost exclusively by State and County government. As such, the Library faces an outsized threat that small cuts to funding at either source could have sizable impacts on the organization.
 - The State is currently expecting a large budget shortfall due to educational funding mandates passed in their prior session.
 - As the poorest county in the State, the Library's County receives a significant portion of its funding in the form of disparity grants from the State, and cuts at the State level could therefore hit the Library directly and then trickle through the County funding for a second hit.
- Even in a better situation with Statewide budgeting, the Library's income from the State is determined by a formula that increases funding by \$0.40 per capita per year. This funding is slated to grow from \$17.90 to \$18.30 (2.2%) from FY24 to FY25. However, with a small (0.2%) decrease in County population, the Library's actual funding increase will be from \$329,348 to \$334,495 (1.6%).
- State fiscal policy also provides benefits for the Library. Significant dedicated funding for the State Library Resource Center and Regional Resource Center provide for services to patrons that the Library itself would instead need to budget for, including the Integrated Library System (a.k.a. the catalog), all online resources, fiber networks to the mainland libraries, and delivery between branches.
- The State mandates \$7.5 million per year towards construction of library facilities. In the past several years, the State budget has significantly exceeded this mandate, averaging more than \$9.3 million. Additionally, due to poverty in the County, the Library could expect

90% of the funds for any capital project to come from this funding, with only 10% needing to be provided locally.

- State legislation increases the Library's expenses at a match faster rate than the State increases the Library's income. The Maryland Minimum Wage Bill (2019) and the Fair Wage Act of 2023(2023) raised the minimum wage in the State from \$10.10 in December 2019 to \$15 in January 2024, an 8.7% annual increase. Given the economic stature of the County and resultant low wages, this increased wages directly for a sizable percentage of the Library's staff, and increased others due to compression effects. The Time to Care Act (2023) imposes a 0.9% payroll tax, split evenly between employer and employee, to create a state-administered fund for family and medical leave, which will cost the Library \$4,000 per year beginning in October 2024.
- In the current legislative session, a bill was passed to enable library staff to collective bargaining, potentially increasing both salaries and wages and the administrative costs to negotiate a contract.
- In the current legislative session, a Freedom to Read bill was passed to restrict attempts to censor books from library collections based on "partisan, ideological, or religious disapproval."

Economic Conditions

- In light of the sub-inflationary growth of the Library's income, inflation disproportionately affects the Library, especially given the need to provide reasonable Cost of Living Adjustments to employees. (Staffing costs make up 68% of the Library's budget.)
- While the Library's wages are low compared to areas in wealthier parts of the State, they are generally higher than most employers in the County and the two neighboring County libraries.
- While low unemployment can limit the pool of applicants for Library positions, the Library is generally seen as a desirable employer, both because of its mission and its wages.
- The Library has and continues to endeavor to shift its staff from part-time to full-time positions, generally by combining two part-time (24-hour) positions into one full-time (40-hour) position. This shifts some of the Library's exposure to increased costs from wages to health insurance, which has generally been beneficial over the past several years. However, it also reduces the number of people and hours available for the basic task of keeping the Library's doors open.

Sociocultural Forces

- While libraries have generally been seen as politically neutral and enjoyed strong support from both sides of the aisle, this is increasingly not the case, with pressures in some communities to remove particular items, general dealing with diverse populations, from collections. While the Library has not directly had to deal with this, several peer libraries in the State have.
- Additionally, the Library operates in a red County in a blue State and therefore faces a potential threat of being hit from both sides. One of our peers has seen this situation – complaints from the conservative side about items in the collection, followed by complaints from the liberal side when a conservative group booked a meeting room for an event. There is sizable pressure in County schools regarding materials available to students.
- The population of the Library's County is slowly shrinking, with an estimated decrease from 25,675 in the 2020 Census to a current 24,546 (4.4%)
- The County is significantly poorer than the State, with a median household income of \$52,149 and 22.2% in poverty, compared to \$98,461 and 9.6% statewide.
- The County's population is also aging slightly faster than the State or national average, with 18.1% over the age of 65. (State: 16.3%; National: 17.3%) Given the leisure time of retirees, this does contribute to the success of several senior and craft-focused programs for the Library, as well as positively affecting the traditional core service of lending print media.
- There is a recurrent theme in the industry that libraries serve children and people with children, with a large gap concerning high school students and young adults. While the Library invests in teen services, attendance at programs is sparse. There are no initiatives specifically aimed at young adults.
- The State has been increasing funding for Pre-K programs at public schools, including expansions to the age 3 group and to all-day programs. This represents a significant, mandated substitute product for early literacy services, which have traditionally been a core service of public libraries.

Technological Factors

- The public library industry has seen multiple arguments, some in good faith and some otherwise, over what is now a matter of decades

that public libraries have become obsolete because of personal computers (1980s), the Internet (1990s), and eBooks (2000s). Instead, Libraries have been at the forefront of public adoption of each of these. However, the constant pressure has perhaps led to an inclination to prove rather than provide value and contributed to pushing libraries to adopt technologies that failed to diffuse as predicted (Second Life) or were not refined enough for mass adoption (3D printers) at the time libraries brought them in.

- That said, while eBooks have stagnated at 30% of the market, streaming music and video services have significantly outcompeted their physical equivalents, taking over 70% of the market. The Library's circulation of music CDs has been low enough for the past several years that the decision to remove them entirely was made this year. The Library's DVD circulation remained strong for years while seeing it drop in other libraries in the State (likely a combination of the County's poverty and lack of broadband access limiting the growth of streaming services). However, DVD circulation dropped precipitously in Fall 2023, and, if it is not an aberration, could represent a significant decrease in another area of the Library's traditional lending model.
- Importantly, while the Library has access to eBooks from a majority of publishers through the Overdrive platform, there is no equivalent for providing video or music content to customers. The available options are limited and generally do not include blockbuster material.
- While broadband access in Somerset County is still below par, there has been significant activity, particularly with ARPA funds, to increase access to fiber connections in the County. The improved bandwidth provided by wireless broadband as well as the availability of Starlink Internet have also increased at-home options for County residents. While the switch to Starlink has increased bandwidth nearly 50-fold at the Ewell Library, and while increased broadband connections are good for the County in general, providing access to both PCs and wireless connections is a core service of the Library's current model.
- Increased home bandwidth, as well as a series of quick responses to the outbreak of the COVID pandemic in 2020, has left the Library with both the technology (Google Drive, laptops) and the staff competence to work from home. However, the day-to-day need to have enough staff in the building to keep the doors open limits the opportunities to do so, even if the employee's specific tasks could readily be performed out of the office.

- While 3D Printing technology has not (yet) reached mass appeal, the Library is seen as a leader both in the state-level library industry and in the community.
- The Library is also seen as a leader in providing STEM programming, particularly with coding and robotics.
- The Library has seen a sudden increase in patrons being victimized by online scams, particularly romance scams. While the administration has taken aggressive steps against this, both the age and the lack of technological knowledge of the average resident increase the likelihood of them being targeted successfully. The Library faces a catch-22: Either providing poor customer service by refusing to “help” someone be scammed, or facing consequences afterward when the person realizes they’ve been scammed.
- Generative AI is being increasingly discussed in the industry. While occasionally helpful for small tasks, this may be another case of pursuing early adoption for the sake of early adoption.

Environmental Factors

- Two of the Library’s three branches are severely exposed to the effects of severe weather and flooding. Ewell routinely closes due to tidal flooding and suffered damage to collections in November 2021 when nearly one foot of water was in the facility. Crisfield’s construction avoids direct damage from flooding, but closures due to an inability to access the facility caused by flooding on Collins St. are not uncommon. While generally a few times per year occurrence, at the time of this writing, it has happened twice in the past month.

Legal/regulatory factors

- While the State has extensive statutes governing the operations of public libraries, most of those statutes are not burdensome, requiring services that the Library would be providing regardless, such as children’s programming, technology instruction, and free public access to computers. Other parts of the statute define common sense measures, e.g., setting the size of the Library Board at a reasonable seven members, restricting Board membership to County residents, and protecting the confidentiality of library records.
- While the Building Lifelong Learners Act (2020), which prohibited fines on children’s material, had a fiscally detrimental effect on other libraries in the State, the Library had already gone fine-free for all age groups in 2018.

SWOT Analysis

Strengths

The strengths of the Library are largely concentrated in various aspects of its staffing. First, as a public service organization, the Library naturally draws applicants who are, if not inclined to the specific mission of the Library, at least inclined towards the general purpose of public libraries. Secondly, the Library staff is largely recruited locally, giving employees a deep and personal understanding of the community they serve. The Library also has both a younger staff and significantly lower turnover than most of its contemporaries, enabling resources to be spent in developing staff talents with a relatively low need to worry about losing those developed resources to other organizations.

In addition to the strengths possessed by both the Library's staffing and its individual staff, the Library enjoys strong support from both its Board of Trustees and from County governance.

Weaknesses

The critical weakness of the Library is in its financial model, with the issues there trickling into other areas and creating related weaknesses. The Library receives roughly two-thirds of its funding from County government and one-third from State government, with negligible income from any other source. Moreover, the State funding grows at 2% per capita per year; with Somerset County's population slowly shrinking, this leads to essentially flat funding, with a decreasing impact relative to inflation. Given that the Library operates in the poorest county in the State, County funding also grows slowly due to limitations on the County's overall funding. (However, due to the strong support from the County, the Library is relatively well funded compared to peers in other poor counties.)

The general poverty in the Library's locality affects the Library's staff in numerous ways. The Library's heavy emphasis on recruiting and developing staff locally is largely driven by the fact that it cannot compete on salaries with libraries in wealthier areas, where pay scales can be 50% higher. It also generally cannot compete on salary for staff with advanced degrees, which drives a heavy emphasis on internal development of staff within the organization.

Because of the small size of the organization, with less than 20 full-time equivalents on staff, almost all specialty positions (e.g., Children's Services,

Teen Services, Technical Services, etc.) have staff sizes of one, which presents a risk that the loss of a single staff member can instantly deplete the organization of knowledge and skills in a core function.

Opportunities

There are several opportunities that the Library could pursue to advance its strategic objectives. Most of these opportunities rest in utilizing existing connections in the community, whether with individuals, like-minded organizations, or potential funders.

The Library is well-regarded by a wide range of individuals both from within its county and from neighboring counties, where many people “cross the border” because of the higher quality of customer service. Given the Library’s strategic goal to expand the range of programs, events, and classes that it provides for its patrons, the individual talents of these people could be brought to serve the vision by sharing their individual knowledge, whether professional or hobbyist, for either no cost (other than minimal staff time scheduling and setting up programs) or light honoraria. Many of them may also be amenable to either individual giving or participation at a smaller level in a fundraising campaign. In both the programmatic and financial cases, the Library has never made the ask.

The Library also interacts with a slew of non-profits, service organizations, and other government agencies in pursuit of its broad mission. Connections with these organizations could be more formally managed to position the Library as a keystone of the community.

The Library also has facilities in the two towns in the county that are among both the largest and most central public facilities in those communities. With general societal shifts from public libraries as a collection of books to public libraries as a third place away from home and school/work, those facilities could be better exploited to offer a wide range of activities for the community and to invite the community in (related to the above programmatic objective) to develop their own activities.

The Library has additional opportunities in development of its staff. While the organizational culture strongly drives employees to pursue professional development – there are a host of free or low-cost opportunities available in the public library world – the current approach is largely that administration simply tallies the number of opportunities taken. A stronger, more focused organization could be built by assigning specific opportunities, or at least ensuring that opportunities pursued are directly

related to the employee's functions. This would alleviate some of the weaknesses of having single-employee specialized functions, as other staff could receive some training in the function, either to assist or as an interim or permanent contingency in case of turnover of staff in key positions.

Threats

As noted above, the Library is funded almost exclusively by State and County government. As such, the Library faces an outsized threat that small cuts to funding at either source could have sizable impacts on the organization. With the State currently expecting a large budget shortfall due to educational funding mandates passed in their prior session, this is a very real risk. As the poorest county in the State, the Library's County receives a significant portion of its funding in the form of disparity grants from the State, and cuts at the State level could therefore hit the Library directly and then trickle through the County funding for a second hit.

While libraries have generally been seen as politically neutral and enjoyed strong support from both sides of the aisle, this is increasingly not the case, with pressures from some community members to remove particular items, general dealing with diverse populations, from collections. While the Library has not directly had to deal with this, several peer libraries in the State have. Additionally, the Library operates in a red County in a blue State and therefore faces a potential threat of being hit from both sides. One of our peers has faced this situation – complaints from the conservative side about items in the collection, followed by complaints from the liberal side when a conservative group booked the publicly available meeting room for an event.

While the Library has designed a careful strategy to recruit and develop staff locally rather than trying to compete with far richer jurisdictions in the State, there does remain some threat that an employee could decide that geographic ties no longer trump the pay increase that they could obtain in exchange for moving to one of the wealthier counties in the State. While effective, the Library's internal development process takes time to get someone up to higher functions - for the most part, staff comes in as part-time customer service assistants, develops in that role and in the organizational culture, and then, based on talent and inclination, begins to be developed into a more specialized role.

Impact on Strategic Decisions

An impact that is regularly considered is how the high levels of customer service and professional development can be brought to bear to achieve strategic objectives. With an organizational culture that is focused heavily towards professional development, the Library can readily harness new initiatives, whether conceived independently or as part of larger State Library Agency initiatives. Conversely, the Library is aware that current staff may not always be there and that specialized functions are overly centralized in individuals. However, this awareness could be better acted on, e.g., by making staff development a more formal function and including cross-training, to make better strategic initiatives.

Currently, the fiscal weaknesses and threats, as well as the opportunities to diversify income sources, are largely unspoken of. The Library also, as is the nature of modern public libraries, pursues a seemingly endless array of initiatives in developing physical collections of books and DVDs, digital collections, programs, events, classes, and public training that never connects back to financial matters. The Library could do a much better job in considering these weaknesses and threats when it is making strategic decisions and setting initiatives, and this may give the Library the impetus to pursue some of the fundraising opportunities that may be available.

Likewise, while the Library has built up a large number of connections with both individuals and other organizations through the services and partnerships it provides for them, the Library has never considered treating this as a two-way street. Considering both the talent and donations that could be brought to bear, possibly just for the asking, could open up a new strategic arena in which to operate for the Library.

Strategic Adaptation

The Library is well known among its customers for both the quality of its customer service and its capacity to both rapidly adapt and then train the public on technology, including a broad range of emerging technologies. The Library also has a reputation for flexibility in assisting our patrons with their individual needs.

While this reputation does draw additional customers to the Library, bringing people across the borders from neighboring Counties either for routine library usage or to seek out classes or one-on-one assistance dealing with technological matters, the constraints involved with the Library's funding model mean that increased and expanded outcomes are not reflected in the income necessary to develop and deploy those services.

The strategic plan will call for enhancement and diversification of the Library's income into additional sources, particularly via grants and donations, and the Library's excellent customer service, strong reputation, and demonstrated expertise will come into play there, utilizing intangible assets (reputation) to generate tangibles (funds).

While the quality of customer service and the range of services, outreach, and programming has reached such a level that our staff is training other organizations, growth has proceeded incrementally and opportunistically, and the Library should now transition to solidify structures and processes to capitalize on the advantages that it has built.

In general, public libraries constantly see threats from new competitors entering the market, particularly technologies, or at least are told they are facing them, whether that be from the introduction of personal computers in the 1980s, the Internet in the 1990s, or eBooks in the 2000s.

While libraries in general have a solid history of adopting and adapting new technologies, it may not be particularly relevant here – a sizable portion of the Library's advantage is in the way it provides services (i.e., the high quality of customer service), not in the particular services it provides. The Library also possesses a sizable advantage in its staff's ability to rapidly understand new technologies and then teach library patrons.

What would typically be characterized as threatening new entrants may actually boost the Library's particular edges – more technology means less individualized, face-to-face customer service in the market in general,

further enhancing the value of the Library's customer service, and it means that people will trust the Library's strong reputation for technology training.

Strategic Model

With the continual broadening of the services offered by public libraries in general, as well as initiatives unique, or reasonably so, to the Somerset County Library, the Library, despite its small size, can be viewed through a corporate model with interests in a range of services with varying levels of connection between them: the traditional business of lending books (and other physical media), the also traditional business of providing educational events for children, the digital business of providing eBooks and other online content, the technology training business of providing classes and one-on-one sessions in the use of technology, the print shop business of providing copiers and printers for customer use, the lifestyle & leisure business of providing craft programs for retirees, and a small manufacturing business that uses the 3D printers to produce custom physical objects.

Again, given the Library's small size, many of these functions, and certainly the staff providing them, overlap heavily. The Library must also navigate the fact that many of them are being developed and deployed by departments of one.

It is noted in the PESTEL analysis that there is a large gap concerning services to high school students and young adults in the library industry in general. The Library also faces a sizable new entrant in its services to younger children, with the expansion of pre-kindergarten to include the age 3 group as well as being a mandated, full-day service. On the other end of the spectrum, while the Library's services to seniors are successful, there is heavy competition, including that from another state-funded provider, the Commission on Aging that provides similar leisure activities.

As such, the Library is currently serving markets with plenty of activity while ignoring markets where the field is relatively open. Looking at the Library in this light, there are several ways that the Library could utilize its existing advantages in customer service and technology to expand into additional services, or to retrench where the PESTEL and SWOT analyses point to threats to the long-term continuity of services.

Structural Development

Goal: Clarify organizational structure to remove friction between functional and day-to-day roles.

Given the wide-ranging services that the Library provides, and the fact that many of these services are tied to a physical space, the Library can face friction from a high degree of overlap, with individual staff members often having both a functional role (e.g., preparing and presenting programs for a particular age group) and a role in day-to-day operations.

Goal: Shift service evaluations from tallying measures to qualitative measures.

Currently, the Library is far too reliant on simply tallying usage figures (e.g., books checked out, computers used, questions asked) to ascertain the quantity of services offered. (This is an industry-wide issue.) There are no formal processes to ascertain the quality of those services, other than a survey conducted every five years as part of strategic planning. Even at an informal level, the Library generally logs compliments (for reference in personnel reviews) and directly remediates complaints, with corrective action as necessary, but without formalized connection to continuous improvement efforts.

However, tallying does not reflect quality and cannot be used to drive continuous improvement. For instance, programs are effectively formally evaluated by the size of the audience, but the size of the audience does not reflect the quality of the program, it reflects the quality of the marketing and is very vulnerable to impacts from weather or from other organizations holding events on the same day.

To better ascertain the quality of services and have a base from which to drive continuous improvement, the Library needs to develop processes that will shed light on customer's opinions. This needs to occur much more frequently than the current five-year survey and should take a more focused form than that survey. (For instance, the current survey asks all patrons about the quality of teen services, most of them have no basis to make that appraisal, and many of them check "Very High" anyway because that's their general opinion of the Library.) This would help to provide smaller, more frequent sets of data. The Library could also implement very brief surveys at the conclusion of a program to get specific and contemporaneous information from customers on the quality of that

specific program, which would help the Library better evaluate the program itself and the staff involved in executing it.

With this data in place, the Library would have much more nuanced data in place to evaluate its strengths and weaknesses and make more strategic decisions about which avenues to expand, advance, remediate, or discontinue.

Similar approaches could be taken to getting detailed information on customers' opinions of customer service, collections available, or quality of the experience on the Library's publicly available computers.

Fiscal Development

Goal: Implement strategic budgeting.

To allocate resources sufficiently to support this strategy, the Library will need to engage in serious efforts to engage in strategic budgeting. The Library currently follows the County's template in budgeting, which divides expenses into a scant few categories (personnel, supplies, utilities, insurance, training, and professional fees). The Library internally divides its programming costs between adults and children/teens and divides its materials costs into 15 sub-accounts (e.g., not only are funds dedicated to children's books, but they are also dedicated to early literacy fiction, early literacy non-fiction, school-aged fiction, school-aged non-fiction, audiobooks, DVDs, and magazines).

The single line cost for personnel is 68% of the Library's budget; this greatly omits detail that the Library needs to efficiently allocate resources strategically across its wide range of initiatives. Moreover, it is additionally complicated by the overlapping nature of individual staff member's duties: while an individual staff member may have day-to-day customer service and higher-level programming functions, the Library has no hard data revealing how much of their time is spent on one or the other.

To be able to strategically allocate resources, the Library is first going to need to conduct desk audits to determine how much of each employee's time is currently being spent on each function. Once this understanding is in place, personnel costs should be addressed with a similar detail as the collection budget. If, for instance, an employee earning \$50,000 per year is spending 50% of their time on customer service, 30% on STEM programming, and 20% on early literacy programming, the Library needs

to understand this as \$25,000, \$15,000, and \$10,000, respectively and be prepared to re-allocate the employee's tasks to remove functions or to re-focus the employee from tasks utilizing common skills within the organization towards rarer skills necessary for strategic execution. Likewise, the programming budget needs additional depth, and it is currently understood to represent supply costs and fees for outside presenters; the payroll costs associated with staff time spent on programming also needs to be included as a program cost.

Goal: Develop fundraising capability.

Expansion, even maintenance, of operations is severely constrained by a State funding formula that is legislated to grow at 2% per year through Fiscal Year 2027, with implications of potential flat funding after that due to the State's budget woes.

While County funding is typically more generous, the sub-inflationary growth of State funding, representing one-third of the Library's overall budget, is a continual detriment to any operational goal.

To provide the income needed to sustain operations, the Library will need to develop a capacity for private fundraising. The Library currently has a deficit in such capabilities, with most donations, including a recent large estate gift, being donor-initiated. The only truly private fundraising that the Library engages in is regular grant-seeking from the Community Foundation of the Eastern Shore.

The relationship with the Community Foundation will be vital to developing internal capacity, including the messaging and systems, for fundraising. Once initial approaches are developed, and the funding related to this initiative has begun to contribute to the bottom-line, the Library will have more flexibility in developing the capability and resources to execute at least some of these functions internally on an on-going basis.

Goal: Enhance informational systems to support generation and management of donor funds.

The Library will need an informational system dedicated to the proposed fundraising activities related to diversifying income sources. The Library may eventually need to develop, especially if pursuing large individual donations, by implementing Customer Relationship Management processes to maintain a comprehensive list of not just donations, but contacts, discussions, and inclinations of specific donors.

Since the Library has not previously sought to diversify its income for operational purposes, there are no policies in place on how it will do so; these policies will need to be developed.

Talent Development

Goal: Develop resources to expand staff training into high-demand skills, particularly where there is no existing capacity.

The Library has a strong reputation for high quality customer service, but it also faces limitations in functional areas, where almost all “departments” contain a single staff member. To provide for stronger day-to-day operations (e.g., by having trained substitutes available in advance) and for long-term succession, cross-training into the existing “departments of one” is necessary.

This plan also calls for initiation of private fundraising. The Library has limited experience in applying for grants and none in pursuing individual donors, and there are no existing staff with responsibility for this function. As such, the Library is going to need to recalibrate to create room for oversight and execution of this function.

Goal: Formalize professional development into focused curriculum for skills relevant to strategic execution.

The Library has a strong history of promoting from within, including promotion to a newly created position designed to further utilize a staff member’s particular talents, as well as increasing salary to reflect educational achievement and enhancing job descriptions.

The Library will also need to retrench itself in its approach to new ideas from employees. Current appraisal consists of looking at whether the idea is a net social good and whether it is feasible; this approach compounds the issue with modern public libraries having an endlessly expanding list of goals and services. Employees have always had a great deal of freedom to select and pursue professional development opportunities from the wide world of libraries; leadership will need to be diligent in communicating that, as part of a focused strategy, it may insist that employees pursue particular courses of professional development.

Goal: Conduct desk audits as a tool to align job descriptions with both important and time-consuming tasks.

While already described as a strategic budgeting tool, desk audits will also play a role in defining a matrix of important and/or time-consuming tasks to provide insight into skills that need to be developed or expanded in the organization.

Goal: Revise Staff Credo.

Additionally, the Library has a Staff Credo. While the Credo is not misaligned with the new strategy, it was imposed wholesale and copied verbatim from another organization. Once staff has been given time to digest the new vision, mission, and core values, serious discussions should begin to rewrite the Staff Credo to reflect the values of the organization in particular.

Operational Development

Goal: Develop tools for qualitative analysis of operations.

Analytical capacity will need to be developed to drive this strategy forward. Several parts of the strategy call for a much more detailed look at the quality of services, focusing on specific services, specific locations, specific times, and specific employees. To be able to adequately benchmark, gather, and analyze data, the Library will need to develop the ability to use new tools to analyze operations from a qualitative, rather than a quantitative, perspective. It is likely that the Library may also need to develop these tools itself.

Goal: Enhance documentation of common procedures and edge cases to provide front-line staff with clearer guidance while retaining flexibility in serving individual customers.

Given the large degree of individual customer service needs, the Library allows employees a large degree of freedom in choosing how to best assist a customer. Because of the small size of the organization, this largely does not have a negative impact on the flow of information, but it can lead to variations in the way that individual situations are addressed, particularly between locations.

The Library continually reviews operational policies. However, the Library is much weaker regarding documentation of procedures. While there are general task lists (e.g., opening and closing checklists), there is no specific, written detail on how tasks should be performed, and this information is

generally transmitted verbally as needed. Likewise, detailed procedures are generally written when a new service is deployed, and once staff is trained, the written document is set aside. The Library should collect existing documents and generate additional, written procedural information to ensure that this information is readily available to all employees at all times.

Goal: Extoll operational successes.

The Library hires into entry-level positions for customer service inclinations, not library ones (applicants believing that they're going to sit around and read books all day is a traditional red flag in the industry).

This is at least somewhat interwoven with a culture of modesty in the organization, with a "that's what we're here for" approach to the wide-ranging services that we provide. With a shift to externally extolling the organization's successes as part of the fundraising push to diversify income sources, the Library will need to focus on shifting the internal culture to do so as well.

Conclusion

The Library is one of the most well-regarded organizations in its community. Following this plan, it has an opportunity to increase its value to by implementing specific strategies to better leverage strengths and to diversify and expand its income by initiating fundraising strategies. These strategies will allow the Library to fully develop itself as "the Heart of the Community."

The strategy is a well-rounded and comprehensive plan that takes into consideration various aspects that are essential for success and sustainability. Through SWOT and PESTEL analyses, it addresses the strengths and weaknesses of the organization itself, opportunities and threats in the library's direct environs, and larger trends in the macro-environment. The planned strategy designs the manner in which the Library can best leverage its competitive advantages in this environment.

To execute this strategy, the Library will need to introduce new processes. Many of the Library's existing measurements concern only the quantity of services. This plan calls for much more frequent gathering of data to analyze the quality of services, as well as the development of systems to manage and analyze this data. The plan also calls for new systems to guide

the activities and development of employees in manners that directly leverage competitive advantages to further the Library's pursuit of its vision.

By following this plan, the Library will be well-poised for success and growth in the long-run, both by expanding the pool of resources, fiscal and otherwise, available to the Library and formalizing the strategies by which the Library will utilize those resources to leverage its strengths in the community.