



westbanklibraries
STRATEGIC PLAN
2019-2023



Introduction

Understanding the purpose and limits of strategic planning

The purpose of strategic planning is to establish a vision for growth which allows our library to focus its efforts and resources toward a common vision so that we may create through combined, collaborative effort something greater than we would have without any such forethought.

We cannot truly plan, because we do not understand the future—but this is not necessarily bad news. We could plan while bearing in mind such limitations. It just takes guts.

–Nassim Nicholas Taleb, Antifragile

In the process of planning, we have drawn on community input, staff input, assessment results, demographic data, and a broad reading of library industry literature and national/global movements and forecasts in order to identify trends that are likely to affect our library and our community over the next few years and beyond.

Our aim with this plan is to provide a framework for team decision-making over the next five years as we work to meet community needs, to help the community realize its aspirations, and to prepare the library and the community for changing times.

Living in such changeable times makes strategic planning challenging. We need a vision

- that stays true to our mission, while providing pathways for changing the ways we meet that mission,
- that recognizes that current trends may be transitory and that the unexpected can happen at any time,
- that allows us to capitalize on or at least weather unexpected events,
- that is sustainable within the constraints of our financial, spatial, and staffing resources, and
- that prioritizes the continued development of an antifragile mindset in our staff.

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Our Mission

Staying true to who and what we are

At Westbank Libraries, we support the community by connecting people with ideas, experiences, and each other.

Our mission

- *provide exemplary, friendly, professional service*
- *offer a diverse, balanced, current, well-organized collection*
- *present programs that promote learning, sharing, and discovery*
- *partner with community volunteers*
- *reach out beyond our walls to nurture conversations and make connections*
- *provide current technology and assistance in its use*
- *create a welcoming space with minimal rules*
- *provide digital access to available resources*
- *anticipate and respond to changing community needs*
- *engage area schools, community groups, and businesses in partnerships*
- *demonstrate exceptional stewardship of community funds and assets*
- *foster a collaborative and supportive work environment*

A library is a **community center** – a place to read, share, learn, play, discover, meet, join, work, research, create, relax, feel at home.

A library is a **curator** – an organizer of information, a collector of locally relevant information, a reference assistant, a provider of context, a saver of time.

A library is an **advocate** – a supporter of literacy, lifelong learning, reading for enjoyment, access to information, information and technological literacy, inclusion, privacy, and intellectual freedom.

A library is a **partner** – a networker, a host, a voice at the table, a sharer of information, a co-creator.

A library is a **platform** – a stage for community creation, a laboratory for self-directed exploration, a convener of civic conversations, a whitespace for new thought, a stimulus for growth.

Thinking about the future

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the Technology Boom

The technology boom is changing the way we work, the way we learn, the way we play, and the way we live. Artificial intelligence, virtual reality (VR) and its hybrids, block chain technology for provenance traceability (personal identification, copyright registration, cryptocurrency), robotics, and the proliferation of smart products are making developmental leaps every day.

These technologies collect, connect, analyze, and disburse information in ways that imitate human learning, but they have advantages over humans in being able to process masses of data, endure endless repetition, work round the clock, and perform consistently with fewer and fewer errors. Machines will be replacing humans in many jobs, and new as-yet-unimagined jobs will be our near-future careers.

As information collectors and providers, libraries are already seeing changes. Digital media has replaced our reference collections and is now impacting the usage of our popular collections. Our users are heading to Google and Siri and Alexa with their reference questions, and librarians at the desk are answering technology questions instead.

While we don't anticipate physical collections disappearing, their use will continue to decline while digital collection use increases. Our role will shift to connecting people to information in ways that new technologies do not: programs, personalized research at the point of need (outreach, embedded librarianship), up-to-date tech help, and community information collection and dissemination (community calendar, sharing local resources).

Beyond preparing ourselves for change, we also have a responsibility to help our communities prepare for a future that no one can really predict.

Self-Directed Education (SDE)

Public libraries have always been centers for self-directed education, providing access to information, technology, and programs so that people can explore their interests at their own pace and initiative. Given the magnitude of change that artificial intelligence and other technologies will bring in the coming years, we need to expand our thinking about how we support self-education. We need to help our communities develop a learning lifestyle which includes experimentation and collaboration.

Traditional educational offerings in a public library setting meet a variety of learning and participatory styles:

- books, articles, audios, and film in physical and digital formats,
- expert speakers,
- classes and online tutorials,
- one-on-one assistance (tech help, reference service),
- guided experiences (demonstration and creation, hands-on learning), and
- self-supporting interest groups (book clubs, discussion groups, craft groups).

To stretch our community as learners, we now need to shift some of our program offerings away from structured learning and toward increased agency. We need to create learning environments that invite choice, autonomy, self-direction, collaboration, divergent thinking, and iterative testing of ideas. These environments are stimulus-rich and allow expanded access.

Interest Network The interest network is an extension of the self-supporting interest group. It develops organically around the energy of the participants to include multiple avenues for connecting and learning. At the request of a couple of parents, we began offering sensory storytime for kids on the autistic spectrum. Through the collaborative efforts of participants, the Outside of the Box Children network has grown to include a monthly speaker series, videos of talks for parents that cannot attend, and a listserv so parents can share information with each other. Sensory storytime continues to transform in response to the shifting needs of the children and currently has a center-based format.

Our education network began as an education book club brought to us by a member of the public, who has also volunteered as an educational speaker. As energy has developed around the topic, the group is beginning to look at other ways to stay connected over this important topic – community conversations, documentary sharing, and panel discussions are among the possibilities for growth.

Open-ended Exploration In open-ended exploration, we offer an extended time frame (come-and-go format of two or more hours) and environmental stimulation to encourage an immersive experience of collaboration, experimentation, and play. Immersion and agency are key factors for creative development.

The benefits of play are well-documented: decision-making, risk assessment, risk taking, relationship negotiation, empathy, collaboration, and change navigation. To be successful, play should be measurement-free (unless agreed by players). As children age beyond toddlerhood, play should become increasingly adult-free. Teens and adults need fun too: game-playing, creative activity, discovery activity, and shared community events. Play relieves stress and opens us to new thought patterns.

Generational needs

Our youngest generations interact with information differently than older generations, considering speed to be important and multi-tasking across platforms easily. Short-term memory may be increased at the expense of long-term memory.

These generations are reaching adult milestones later than earlier generations due to changes in the economy, the workplace, and parenting style (constant supervision). They are enduring a highly competitive educational environment which has caused an increase in anxiety and related health and social issues. They are preparing for jobs that don't yet exist, and they may take on large college debt for hard-to-find jobs.

The middle generations live very busy lives, working to support families, tending to the myriad needs of children (dependent children and increasingly, adult children) or elderly relatives (or all of these), including financial support in some cases. A changing workplace may mean unexpected job loss and/or need to re-train. A changing economic climate may mean insufficient savings for retirement.

Older generations (age 55+) are now 28% of our community, and many of our older citizens are hoping to age in place. They have more time for leisure, volunteering, learning, and second careers. They may need help with financial planning and obtaining support services and health information.

Connection and inclusion

Our community is asking for more opportunities to connect, both formally (events) and informally (gathering spaces). They are asking for inter-generational connection, shared interest groups, meaningful dialogue, collaborative opportunities, and collective opportunities to give back. They are asking for better, centralized communication.

As our community becomes more diverse, our resources and services need to consider the informational needs of different groups. We need to work toward increased integration and participation of minority groups, newcomers, and vulnerable populations, removing unnecessary barriers to access.

Partnerships across community organizations provide opportunities to create greater impact and build relationships that make the community stronger.

An Antifragile Mindset

Creating conditions for evolution

In rapidly changing times, the ability to nimbly adapt to changing conditions is the key to surviving and thriving. It is an ability that is honed when we embrace stressors as opportunities to

- to learn and become better learners,
- to stretch and become more flexible,
- to increase our stamina and capacity,
- to build relationships and develop networking skills, and
- to adapt and become more adaptable.

This is antifragile. An antifragile mindset welcomes feedback, change, mistakes, problems, unknowns, surprises, deadlines, and challenges as opportunities to grow stronger.

Toward this end, our staff employs strategies that help us move from one challenge to the next:

OUTWARD FOCUS We focus outward toward the community. The library belongs to the people who live in our community, and our continued viability is contingent on understanding their needs, their concerns, and their goals. We are focused on helping to build the kind of community our members and neighbors want to live in.

ONGOING CHANGE We believe that ongoing change is essential for us to thrive and remain relevant as a community resource. We are fluid – rolling from one thing to the next, always looking at where we can do better. Ranganathan's Fifth Law of Librarianship reminds us: *The library is a growing organism.*

INTENTIONAL DECISION MAKING We choose solutions that are flexible, that build relationships, that are simple and sustainable, and that create impact. We accept current reality and look for our next best step.

COLLABORATIVE TEAMWORK Team members support each other, back each other up, share in decision making and problem solving, and give each other feedback in order to align their work toward a common vision.

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING There is strength in a united community that supports each other and collaborates for increased impact. We take every opportunity to build relationships and strengthen the community network.

Imagining our future

Westbank Libraries support the community in rapidly changing times by helping people connect, learn, and play.

CONNECT The library's role in connecting people to ideas, experiences, and each other takes on new significance in times of great change. Our connections are what sustain and support us, giving us a place to turn when we need help.

As the information landscape changes, we are connecting people to **ideas** in new ways: increased digital resources, additional information delivery methods, diverse programming content, and embedded librarianship. We are connecting them to **experiences** in new ways: renewed hospitality, mixture of usable spaces, programs for varied participation styles, and video programs. And we are connecting them to **other people** in new ways: community celebrations, inter-age activities, interest groups and networks, community conversations, social media, and outreach.

LEARN Being lifelong learners is imperative if we are to ride the wave of change that is upon us. Some learning may happen in a traditional educational setting, where an expert shares his or her accumulated knowledge. But as more and more information is available through a quick Internet search, learning is less about accumulating knowledge and more about the activity of learning: imagining, trying, failing, persevering, experimenting, tinkering, discovering, risking, innovating, evaluating, and collaborating. Learning becomes a fitness exercise to prepare us for a lifetime of more learning as well as a path to skill development and mastery.

PLAY Play is how children naturally learn, but people of all ages benefit from different kinds of play. Some types of play are designed to satisfy curiosity, a direct form of learning. Other types of play, like collaborative pretending or competitive games, involve indirect learning. In these types of group play, we create and negotiate rules, accommodate for differing skill levels, develop strategies, take calculated risks, learn to argue effectively, and empathize with other players to ensure everyone is having fun.

For an activity to be considered play, it must be voluntary – we can quit whenever we want to. We can also bring a playful attitude to any endeavor. Play and playfulness are important sources of relaxation and stimulation. They help us imagine better outcomes, move more fluidly between options, and manage more easily in times of change.

Our Plan

Fulfilling our mission in changing times

Our plan suggests ways to help our community and our staff **connect, learn, and play** in each area of library operation. Teams will take an antifragile approach to decision making in their areas of responsibility, emphasizing flexibility, simplicity, sustainability, and impact.

Public Service

Public Service refers to any role that interacts directly with the public, including circulation, reception, reference, and programs. We understand that everyone we meet in public service is on their own journey, viewing life through the lens of their own experiences. We do not expect others to share our viewpoint but strive instead to understand theirs and to find points of agreement. Our goal is to provide professional, friendly service and to build relationships. We will

- review policies and procedures to remove unnecessary barriers to access and simplify the user experience,
- investigate alternative staffing and scheduling models to use staff to best advantage in public service,
- investigate public service innovations at other libraries (literature review, visits to other libraries, webinars) for possible application at our libraries,
- continue staff trainings on approachability, listening, mirroring, and de-escalating,
- develop staff readers' advisory skills to enrich information sharing with the community and create opportunities to bond with members over books and films,
- develop staff technology skills, keeping current in order to help members efficiently and without undue stress,
- nurture our volunteer relationships, making good use of their time and creating personal connections, and
- find playful ways to interact with the public (staff and volunteer T-shirts, guessing games, surprises, treats, photo ops, conversation wall, etc.).

Collections

Our physical collection is well-developed and maintained, and despite declining statistics, it is still well-utilized. We anticipate further declines matched in part by increases in the use of digital resources. We also recognize that busy people may be reading less and may need enticement to re-engage with books. We will

- nurture existing books clubs and encourage the establishment of new book clubs around reading interests,

- develop avenues for reading promotion (book reviews on Facebook, book match, the next five, My Librarian, etc.),
- investigate the possibility of homebound delivery,
- develop a robust collection of eBooks and e-audios, and introduce new digital reference tools (our Digital Branch),
- evaluate language learning resources and language material collection needs,
- evaluate collection usage, size, and display for ease of access and optimal deployment,
- develop and promote our collection of shared online resources (databases, newspapers, e-magazines, learning resources) in line with community interests and needs,
- investigate sustainable streaming resources that would enhance our collection and meet community needs, and
- use humor and surprise in collection displays and Facebook posts to encourage interaction and promote a culture of reading.

Programs

Programs will be a major growth area over the next five years. This is where connection, learning, and play will be most evident as we work to develop a calendar of events that is balanced around interests, age groups, learning mode, participation preferences, location, and schedule. We will

- offer programming to meet different participatory styles, including
 - **traditional learning** (speakers, panels, classes),
 - **self-supporting interest groups and networks** (crafts, games, travel, book clubs, education, special needs, language, culture, civic issues), and
 - **experiential learning** (guided discovery and open-ended exploration in play, science, mindfulness, art & craft, writing, technology, etc.).
- continue learning about educational theory and play,
- offer programs that support community members with special needs or sensory issues,
- encourage inter-age activity through program design and volunteer matching,
- video and live-stream events to meet audiences at their convenience,
- welcome new programs led by members of the public when feasible,
- develop program partners amongst staff and volunteers to assist with setup and cleanup and connect with the public at the program,
- utilize and help develop our outdoor spaces for programming,
- promote a non-competitive, relaxed atmosphere at programs,
- unite the community through community conversations, events, and culturally inclusive programming,
- work with administration to gather outcomes feedback from the community, and
- promote celebration and moments of random joy.

Outreach & Embedded Librarianship

Outreach is another growth area for us. It includes connecting with the community outside of our spaces as well as inviting other community groups into our spaces. We will

- meet with community leaders to gather and share information,
- attend community meetings and provide follow-up reference research,
- seek out partners for programs and events to increase impact (grant foundations, schools, businesses, other organizations),
- offer programs in other locations (pre-schools, senior facilities, Chamber of Commerce),
- investigate the feasibility of organizing group field trips for community members,
- invite community artists to exhibit and demonstrate their craft at Laura's Library,
- partner with the Friends to build a common vision for library and community support,
- develop Eanes History Center resources, improve accessibility, and offer local history programming,
- develop the community garden into a sustainable Edible Learning Garden with grant support, and
- share library innovations with the wider library community.

Public Relations

Public Relations (PR) includes non-administrative messaging between the library and the community: social media, newsletters, articles, website information, signage, flyers, and email communications. We strive for a consistent, concise, welcoming message. We will

- continue to develop a visual vocabulary for different types of signage to save the reader time as we connect them to information,
- investigate ways to use technology and additional print formats to share information more efficiently,
- collect and disseminate information from other community organizations to our membership (community calendar, social media posts, newsletters),
- create fun videos and posts to share library information and to build relationships between staff, volunteers, and the public,
- incorporate accessibility elements in communications where possible (closed captioning, font choice and size, etc.), and
- reach out to newcomers in our area (Welcome Wagon, other communications).

Digital Branch

The Digital Branch of the library, available 24/7 through our website, offers members the opportunity to browse the physical collection through the catalog, to check out digital materials, to access digital reference tools, to “attend” recorded programs, to manage their accounts, to get reading recommendations, and to ask questions. It is in a constant state of development. We will

- continue to develop navigation and connection tools (calendaring, program reminders by text, readers' advisory, etc.),
- investigate other library websites for innovations that might be useful for us,
- investigate options for a community calendar and information sharing, and
- create surprises and humor in digital communications.

Technology

Technology includes the hardware and software used by library staff as well as the community. We strive to keep it current and secure, and we make choices for the community that ensure access to basic services (Internet, wifi, printing) as well as advanced services of particular interest and need in this community. We will

- offer technology trainings in a variety of formats (Tech Help, Lynda.com, coding),
- offer opportunities to play with technology (tech petting zoos, Lego Mindstorm with Scratch coding, video games),
- investigate adding technology equipment to future programs (green screen, hand tools, sewing machine, simple robotics, coding, etc.),
- investigate the possibility of chat windows on public computers to make asking questions easier,
- offer wireless printing,
- investigate the need for laptop and hotspot checkout, and
- stay abreast of new technology trends.

Staffing

For our staff to support the community through change, we ourselves must be good at change. To inspire learning in our community, we must be learners ourselves. To encourage our community to play, we must be playful ourselves. We utilize a feedback loop where staff members partner with their managers to set goals, review job descriptions, and recognize accomplishments. We utilize a team structure for collaborative work and decision-making. We will

- continue to prioritize professional development guided by staff interests and succession planning needs,
- encourage staff to present at conferences to share our successes,
- offer staff opportunities to attend library programs where they can connect with the community, learn, and play,
- develop partnerships between staff members (PR, Outreach, etc.) to encourage shared responsibility, discovery, planning, and coverage,
- review staffing levels and scheduling to ensure whitespace for idea cultivation and creative work (team meetings, project work, planning time), and
- identify opportunities to be more playful.

Volunteerism

Our libraries were founded and built by volunteers, and our volunteer force remains an integral part of running our libraries. Volunteers work at our desks, they help at programs and in tech processing, they operate our book sale room, they run our Friends Group, and they are our ambassadors in the community. We will

- engage volunteers in recruiting more volunteers from our community,
- integrate our Friends Group into Outreach and our overall volunteer program in a way that is mutually supportive,
- enlist volunteers to gather information in the community,
- provide opportunities for volunteers to take on additional tasks like being a program partner (help setup and cleanup, attend, count participants),
- connect our volunteers with each other through photo share, video, games, program promotions, and additional events,
- involve teen volunteers in technology projects and kids' program support for inter-age learning, and
- involve our book sale room volunteers in continued support of outside organizations and book clubs.

Finances

We must be good stewards of community funds. We exercise prudence in spending and investing, we pay attention to changes in our revenue stream, and we make decisions based on sustainability. We are saving for a renovation and (if possible) extension of Laura's Library (see Facilities). We are anticipating needing \$3M to \$4M (Westbank renovation without an addition cost \$2.2M in 2015). We currently have about \$2M saved. Taking a loan for part of the cost is an option.

Facilities

Our libraries are well-used and need continuous maintenance to remain the beloved destinations that they are for our community. We keep spaces as flexible as possible to accommodate a wide variety of uses simultaneously (quiet work, small groups, tutoring, browsing, games, reading, visiting, programs, play, etc.). We want our libraries to feel like a sanctuary from the busy-ness of other places. We will

- continue to develop outdoor spaces (outdoor toys, playscapes, gardens, seating),
- investigate ways to improve hospitality (vending, coffee),
- reconsider how our meeting spaces are used to optimize community use,
- create a workable maintenance plan for the Madrone Trail, community garden, and garden beds,
- develop a facilities manual to ensure maintenance consistency of our properties, and
- develop a video inventory to aid us in case of disaster.

In addition to maintenance and needed updates, we will begin planning for a renovation and extension of Laura's Library at the end of this strategic plan period. This project will seek to

- create additional meeting space for the community,
- consider the feasibility of a lab space for hands-on programming and self-directed learning,
- consider better options for staff spaces,
- create a one-desk public service model like the one at Westbank,
- consider LED lighting and other upgrades,
- re-develop outdoor signage to create a unified campus experience, integrate a trailhead feature, and add a programmable panel to the entry monument sign,
- investigate environmentally friendly options (solar panels, for example), and
- increase the size of the fenced back yard for outdoor programming.

Administration

Administration protects the library: record keeping, performance reports, legal obligations, investments, budgets, policy recommendations, data gathering and analysis, legislative watch, community concerns, and HR functions. Administration also guides library decision-making (strategic planning, development of work culture and organizational structure). We will

- create comprehensive digital files of institutional information,
- create or revise templates for routine record-keeping (timesheets, schedules, cash register reconciliation, etc.),
- review and update all policies for clarity, accessibility, flexibility, and sustainability,
- conduct regular assessments of library resource use throughout the five years and a comprehensive assessment ahead of the next strategic plan, and
- conduct surveys to learn more about community interests and the impact of programming.

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Learning more about our thought process in planning

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