westbanklibraries
STRATEGIC PLAN
2024-2029

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.

> A library is a growing organism.
>
> *– Ranganathan*

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 local/national 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 over time within the constraints of our financial, spatial, and staffing resources, and
- that understands the importance of being good at change.

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Vision

Imagining our future

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

This has been our vision for the past five years, and it equipped us well for the pandemic, a flood, and a renovation! As we imagine the next five years, this vision will take us down new paths.

CONNECT The library's role in connecting people to ideas, experiences, and each other takes on new significance in times of great change, particularly after pandemic lockdowns. Our connections are what sustain and support us, giving us a place to turn when we need help, whether it is through increased access to resources, our welcoming spaces, our friendly staff, or time spent with others at library programs and events.

LEARN Being lifelong learners is imperative if we are to ride the wave of change that is upon us. Learning today is less about accumulating readily-available information 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 voluntary 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.

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 Mission

Staying true to who and what we are

At Westbank Libraries, we

- *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, and*
- *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, and 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, and 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, and a co-creator.

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

Trends

Thinking about the future

Change

We live in rapidly changing times – new technologies, new work models, a shifting information landscape, unpredictable weather, a non-stop news cycle, and disruptions in the social fabric. When change continues unabated, we have to become better at it.

> …the species that survives is the one that is able best to adapt and adjust to the changing environment in which it finds itself.
>
> *– Charles Darwin*

We can do this by continuing to learn new things, by developing flexible thinking through play and creativity, by building relationships and networks for communal support, and by taking breaks for rest and recovery.

At the same time, we need to future-proof as much as possible by building a strong, capable staff, ensuring sufficient savings for capital projects, maintaining our facilities, and watching the legislative session for changes that might affect us.

Community Engagement

The Westbank community has always been bound by its small town feel, its shared history, and its pride in an exceptional school district. In recent years, however, our connections have been frayed by the impact of the pandemic, polarizing social and political forces, and an increasing preference for online interactions over in-person.

> Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.
>
> *– Helen Keller*

Rebuilding a sense of community is an essential role for public libraries. We need to tap into community pride and build on what has always been great about the community, re-finding common ground and providing opportunities for involvement.

We should focus on connection through welcoming spaces, hospitality, participatory programs, and mental health initiatives. We should also connect with the community outside our spaces, providing library services, partnering on community initiatives, and participating in community events.

The Information Landscape

> The problem is not information overload; it's the lack of a good filter.
>
> *– David Weinberger*

The information landscape is going through an upheaval due to increased volume, technology advancements, and deliberate manipulation by people and algorithms.

Libraries play an important role in helping people find, evaluate, and use information amongst a growing array of available and not-always-reliable information sources. Disinformation is rife on the Internet, and particularly on social media apps. It undermines trust and perception, and it is becoming harder to detect.

We also need to teach vigilance with regard to protecting personal data from misuse or abuse through cyberbullying, identity theft, creative theft, and scams.

Artificial Intelligence

Over the next few years, nothing portends disruption more than this burgeoning technology. This segment of the information landscape will require the same information and digital literacy support as other information tools and resources. Particular attention will need to be given to effective prompt engineering, awareness of inherent biases and possible hallucinations, the variety of purposes for which it may be used, data privacy, copyright protections, and the ability of bad actors to create convincing fakes.

Significant ethical concerns include A.I. tools that were trained on copyrighted material without permission, the phenomenal environmental impacts (energy and water use plus noise pollution), and the purchase of publishing houses, databases, and newspapers by A.I. developers hungry for a source of new data.

Despite concerns, our commitment to supporting the community during this era of rapid change necessitates embracing A.I. We should employ a process that is playful yet cautious, and we should join the conversation about ways to make A.I. more ethical and environmentally sustainable.

Our community may be divided regarding our support for A.I.

Education

> Education is the great engine of personal development.
>
> *– Nelson Mandela*

State legislation aimed at schools and school funding could affect budgeting and operations at Eanes ISD, and we should be looking for additional ways to support educational efforts in our schools. Parents in the community report concerns about reduced reading for enjoyment, the need for critical thinking skill development, the politicization of the curriculum, inclusiveness, and disability support.

Self-Directed Education

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. We need to continually expand our thinking about how we support self-education, assisting our patrons in developing a learning lifestyle which includes experimentation and collaboration.

We can help stretch our community as learners by offering stimulus-rich open-ended exploration and programs that emphasize learning in a collaborative group environment.

Health and Mental Health

> When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves.
>
> *– Viktor Frankl*

Pandemic isolation and dependence on online sources of connection and entertainment have had an impact on health and mental health. Community members report anxiety, loneliness, loss of spontaneity, lingering COVID concerns, teen gaming addiction, smartphone addiction, negative social media influence, lack of physical activity, work-school-play imbalance, and the stress of the pace of life.

The library is a valuable resource for health information, as well as a provider of both calming experiences and vibrant activity.

Other concerns to address

- maintaining pandemic readiness
- advocating for diverse collections and maintaining an inclusive environment
- promoting authors as publishers face challenges (supply chain, financing)
- investigating environmental sustainability options
- meeting the specialized needs of different generational cohorts and providing opportunities for intergenerational connection

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, focusing on identified trends.

In our decision making, we need to practice **right-sizing**. We also need to emphasize flexibility, simplicity, sustainability over time, inclusiveness, and impact.

Right-sizing means finding the optimal balance between service/resource offerings, community needs, and library staff/ funding/ space capacities. It means finding the best solutions for the community, without over-stretching, even if it results in lowered statistics.

Collections

Our physical collection is well-developed, maintained, and up-to-date. It is also well-utilized despite declining statistics which are more than matched by increases in digital circulation. In this era of distractions, promoting whole book reading is an essential role for libraries. We will

The physical collection is what distinguishes us as a library from other institutions – our core service and physical attribute.

- investigate providing homebound materials delivery,
- develop community-based collections and book sharing in the community (Bluebonnets for elementary schools, little free libraries for example),
- nurture existing book clubs and encourage the establishment of new book clubs around reading interests,
- seek opportunities to promote reading and books at school visits,
- support Eanes Spanish Immersion program with Spanish language materials,
- continue refining the physical collection and how it is arranged in areas where circulation in changing most,
- continue our commitment to inclusive representation in the collection, and
- use humor and surprise in collection displays and social media posts to encourage interaction and promote a culture of reading.

Our digital collection includes downloadable eBooks, eAudios, magazines, and videos, plus newspapers, research databases, and learning tools. To continue increasing usage, we will

The digital collection is primarily demand driven and well-used, consisting of popular materials and core library resources.

- consider options for increasing checkout limits on high demand resources (Libby and Kanopy in particular),

- consider ways to increase Sora usage in the schools (school visits, school newsletter ads, a method for students to request materials),
- maintain low wait times as much as possible within financial constraints,
- continue support for TumbleBooks and BookFlix in schools,
- continue our support for an inter-library shared collection (CloudLibrary),
- continue to evaluate new resources for possible inclusion, and
- continue to evaluate current resources for continued community need and cost effectiveness.

Our Eanes history collection includes primary source documents, rare copies, photos, and videos, many of which have been digitized. To continue growing this collection and make it more accessible, we will

The Eanes history collection documents the unique heritage of our community.

- investigate platforms for easy searching and delivery of documents, possibly in partnership with the Austin History Center or UNT,
- create transcripts for collection videos and difficult to read documents,
- continue digitization of remaining materials, and
- consider what documents from the recent past should be preserved as they contribute to the continuing history of the community.

Public Service

Public Service refers to any role that interacts directly or indirectly with the public, including circulation, reception, reference, programs, community engagement, PR, and our website.

Public service is where we build relationships with the community. Hospitality is key.

The public service desk is focused on account services, technology assistance, readers' advisory, managing space and resource sharing issues (Code of Conduct), and helping to keep the library presentable. We will

Public service at the desk requires continual updating of skills as new books and technology are released.

- conduct a membership campaign to reach newcomers,
- evaluate alternative services that might be helpful to patrons like notary public service, passport services, Eanes gold card distribution,
- reconsider membership policies and limits, including the possible addition of individual accounts,
- continue staff trainings on approachability, listening, mirroring, and de-escalating,
- continue to develop staff skills in technology, including A.I. tools, in order to offer current technology assistance,

- continue to develop skills in readers' advisory in order to promote reading and books in conversation,
- consider offering one-on-one tech times, perhaps bookable, in addition to after-school tech help hours,
- provide basic reference training for paraprofessional staff,
- nurture our volunteer relationships, and
- find playful ways to interact with the public (staff and volunteer T-shirts, guessing games, surprises, treats, photo ops, conversation wall, etc.).

Programs will continue to be a growth area over the next five years, as we continue to balance our calendar around interests, age groups, learning modes, participation preferences, locations, and schedule. We will

Potential topics aging, retirement, parenting, health topics, college, finance, cybersecurity, A.I. prompt engineering, self-improvement, sensory programs, qi gong, chair yoga, walking path exercise, volunteer projects, legacy topics (preserving history, wills and trusts), adulting, assisted living, dog storytime, memoir writing, DIY projects, home school programs

- provide programming to meet current community needs, including information and digital literacy, health and mental health, generational challenges, and educational topics,
- look for opportunities to move programming outdoors for kids and adults,
- develop programs with the intent of encouraging repeat attendance and group bonding (crafts, games, discussion/book groups, topical speaker series),
- continue to develop exploratory and play-based programs,
- consider name tags at participatory programs to help people get to know each other,
- consider options for special needs programming,
- increase teen after-school programs and volunteer opportunities, providing a listserv to share opportunities,
- continue online programs, particularly for seniors, recording when feasible,
- continue to develop strong programming skills in staff,
- work with administration to gather outcomes feedback from the community, and
- promote celebration and moments of random joy.

Community Engagement is expected to be our largest growth area in the next few years, as we join the community in their spaces, bringing them library services and participating in their events and projects. We will

Community engagement is an essential role for libraries as we seek to build connections, establish ourselves as a community resource, and re-find common ground to build on community strengths.

- begin an ongoing community asset survey of anything that can be used to improve the quality of community life (people, physical places, community services, local governments, worship communities, businesses that provide jobs and support the local economy, etc.),
- undertake visits to schools, preschools, and assisted living centers to share library programs, book talks, services, and information, and to provide library card signup,
- continue annual school librarian meetup,
- continue to develop a communication relationship with the school district, including cross-posting on newsletters, joining committees, and partnering on parenting talks,
- develop a homebound delivery program (book bundles),
- expand voter registration to community spaces (high school, assisted living, other),
- participate in community events (festivals, parades, talks, kinder roundup, back-to-school nights, etc.),
- build on our relationship with the Chamber of Commerce,
- seek out and participate on community committees and volunteer projects,
- consider a community-wide read (annual or semi-annual),
- consider creating a new elementary Eanes history story book for visits to school historical events,
- support local little free libraries and teacher classroom libraries,
- seek out homeschool groups for potential programming and resource support,
- investigate the feasibility of organizing group field trips for community members,
- continue to invite community artists to exhibit and demonstrate their craft at Laura's Library,
- develop more staff to be community engagement partners,
- partner with the Friends to build a common vision for library and community support, and
- share library innovations with the wider library community.

Public Relations includes all non-administrative messaging between the library and community: social media, newsletters, articles, website information, signage, flyers, and email communications. We will

Public relations (PR) should provide a clear, consistent, concise, welcoming message, both sharing information and also reminding the community who we are.

- continue to utilize a weekly newsletter to share both library and community information, including health and safety updates,
- find ways to promote the importance and benefits of reading for enjoyment,
- investigate FB paid advertising for programs, targeted at our two zip codes,
- consider double-posting to Instagram,
- share community stories of ways the library has made a difference (social media, newsletter, and conversation),
- create bookmarks with library card signup info and a QR code to events calendar,
- consider creating reading logs for school distribution (advertising to parents how to get a library card and use Sora),
- create deliverables for a membership drive,
- 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,
- create fun videos and posts to share library information and to build relationships between staff, volunteers, and the public,
- continue to create annual T-shirts for staff and volunteers, and consider wider distribution (Friends sales), and
- incorporate accessibility elements in communications where possible (closed captioning, font choice and size, alt-text, etc).

Technology

Technology includes the hardware and software used by library staff as well as the community. We will

Technology and Internet access are fundamental library resources which must be kept up-to-date and secure. Assisting with technology is a primary function of public service.

- continue to secure our technology against threats and to train staff in cybersecurity,
- plan ahead for replacements, upgrades, and updates,
- provide tools and trainings in A.I. to the staff and community,
- consider other tech trainings, possibly in conjunction with teen volunteers,
- train more staff in technology support,
- provide monitors and keyboards for people to plug their devices into,
- create new Google tours for our libraries and grounds,
- investigate the need for hotspot checkout, and
- stay abreast of technology trends.

Our website (digital library) is available 24/7, allowing members to browse the physical collection, check out digital materials, access digital reference tools, view recorded programs, manage their accounts, get reading recommendations, and more. We will

The website is continually updated to provide pertinent information in an easily navigable format.

- continue to develop navigation and connection tools (calendaring, program reminders by text, readers' advisory, etc.),
- investigate software for managing meeting room requests and program registration,
- keep FAQs updated,
- investigate other library websites for innovations that might be useful for us, and
- create surprises and humor in digital communications.

Our staff

As our library grows, so does our staff. Managing staff requires creating opportunities for growth as well as providing a supportive benefits structure. We will

Our staff stays strong through opportunities to connect, learn, and play.

- provide opportunities for staff members to develop solid decision-making skills that consider goals, need, alternatives, and implementation, as well as flexibility, simplicity, and sustainability over time,
- continue to prioritize professional development guided by staff interests and succession planning needs,
- encourage staff to present at conferences to share our successes,
- identify areas where A.I. could assist staff with their work, particularly for time savings that could yield benefits to the community,
- train staff in the diplomatic handling of patron concerns about library materials,
- offer staff opportunities to attend library programs where they can connect with the community, learn, and play,
- develop partnerships between staff members to encourage shared responsibility, discovery, planning, and coverage,
- maintain good cross-training practices in case of staff absences,
- 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.

Volunteers work at our desks, help with programs and tech processing, operate our book sale room, run our Friends Group, and act as our ambassadors in the community. We will

Volunteers built our libraries and remain an integral part of running our libraries.

- provide drop-in opportunities to volunteer,
- engage volunteers in recruiting more volunteers from our community,
- investigate ways to integrate our Friends Group into community engagement and our overall volunteer program in a way that is mutually supportive,
- enlist volunteers to gather information for our community asset survey,
- 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 annual or semi-annual 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.

Facilities

Our libraries are well-used and need continuous maintenance to remain the beloved destinations that they are for our community. We will

Our libraries' spaces need to be as flexible as possible to accommodate a variety of uses simultaneously. We want them to feel like a sanctuary from the busy-ness of other places.

- make aesthetic improvements to the front plaza paving at Westbank,
- coordinate with neighbors at Laura's Library to extend the walking path into a loop if possible,
- look at environmental sustainability options, including solar panels,
- continue developing a facilities manual and calendar to ensure maintenance,
- continue to maintain facilities to a high standard,
- develop a video inventory to aid us in case of disaster,
- continue to stock PPE, and
- consider canopies or awnings for outside programs.

Administration

Administration includes the Director, Associate Director, management team, accountant and support personnel, with oversight from the Board of Trustees. We will

Administration protects the library through policies and practices covering records, legal obligations, finances, community concerns, and HR functions. Leadership guides library decision making, strategic planning, work culture development, and organizational structure.

- review and revise all policies to guide staff decision making,
- investigate options for improving staff leave benefits,
- update job descriptions to emphasize skill development,
- investigate options for our Westbank property,

- create comprehensive digital files of institutional information,
- create or revise templates for routine record-keeping (timesheets, schedules, cash register reconciliation, etc.),
- watch the legislative session in odd years for proposed bills that could affect library districts,
- watch library news for censorship attempts across the nation and in Texas particularly,
- review and revise all policies to guide staff decision making,
- update job descriptions to emphasize skill development,
- 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.

Financial practices safeguard public funds and protect our financial future, we will

- continue to utilize a conservative budgeting process,
- review financial procedures with an intent to create secure banking and accounting processes,
- simplify investments for ease in management, reliable revenues, and simplicity in reporting,
- continue to have our finances audited annually,
- promote the library as a shared resource that saves money for the community, and
- continue capital savings to make sure our libraries will still be beautiful when they are 100 years old.

Financial stewardship means exercising prudence in spending and investing, paying attention to changes in our revenue stream, and saving for capital projects to avoid debt.