



Bulletin

L I B R A R Y A N D F U N D R A I S I N G C O N S U L T A N T S

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Needs Assessment and Facility Planning – The First Step in Growing Your Library

Many Michigan public library boards and staff face the daily challenge of providing service in space that is too small. Considering the invaluable role libraries play in their communities, especially in difficult economic times, it is unfortunate that inadequate space prevents delivery of much needed resources, services and programming.

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On the road to addressing space issues, needs assessment and facility planning (NAFP) is an important first step. We use a method that relies on community participation to develop a credible space plan and a realistic funding plan for current and future library services. Participation builds ownership (a community plan). With ownership comes financial support, private, public or both, that will be essential to bringing any plan to fruition.

To get the ball rolling, library leadership recruits a committee whose members represent different community constituencies (age, users and non-users, geographic area, etc.). The committee can be any size. At the New Buffalo Township Public Library recently, the committee comprised 25 members but we have worked with both larger and smaller groups.

Needs Assessment Team:

To ensure maximum results from the needs assessment process, populate the committee with community members who have the capacity (affluence and/or influence) to impact the project:
government officials,
community/opinion
leaders, potential major
donors, prospective
campaign leaders.

Over the course of a few meetings, the committee:

- Identifies the unique library needs of the community
- Ascertains what the community would like in the library
- Compares current space to what national planning standards recommend
- Compares current space, services, etc., to other Michigan libraries serving similar populations
- Reviews 20-year population projections for the area served by the library
- Determines total/designated square footage needed to serve the community for the next 20 years based on community wants and needs and library planning standards

Once square footage has been identified, we estimate capital and operational costs. Translating square footage into renovation/construction and operating costs allows the committee to consider the reality of the plan. Though committees are invested in their work and want the best library possible for their community, they also are realistic about what the community will bear financially. If the costs seem out of reach, they sometimes will alter or “phase” the space plan to effect a more modest financial solution.

A significant by-product of the discussion and opinion-sharing that occurs at NAFP meetings is greater awareness of what the library provides in services, resources and programs, as well as how people use the library differently. Even those who don’t use the library come away with a greater appreciation of what it means to those it serves and to the community as a whole. The end result of NAFP is a long-range, realistic plan for library services that comes from the community and begins to build the momentum necessary to see the plan to completion.

Alvah N. Belding Memorial Library

Tenacity and hard work have paid off for the board, staff, Friends and community volunteers of the Alvah N. Belding Memorial Library. After many years of planning and significant fundraising, the Belding community is enjoying an increased collection, new programming and enhanced services in beautifully renovated and expanded space overlooking the Flat River.

The library was built in 1918 and has long been a source of community pride. When library leaders determined in the late 1990s that the building was far too small to serve a population that had quadrupled over the years, the community was quick to say it wanted the library preserved. The eventual expansion plan did just that, adding a wing to the rear and west that harmonizes perfectly with the original design.



According to Toni Jagger, Library Director, "Residents frequently express their pleasure with the way the new construction complements the original historic building and their appreciation of the expanded space, easier accessibility to materials, and improved computer services."



Patrons and visitors love the private study areas, free Wi-Fi, increased computers, display areas and easy access to previously hard to reach reference materials and the genealogy collection. The expanded meeting space is in constant demand by a variety of educational, health, senior and civic groups. Many people just like to hang out in the comfortable chairs to read, relax and enjoy the view from the new wing's expansive curtain of glass or the new "secret garden" terrace. More than 600 new users registered in the first nine months after the library's grand re-opening, and staff has noted the return of patrons who hadn't used the library for years.

Though the journey to raising nearly \$1.2 million and qualifying for an RDA loan wasn't easy or short, Toni enthusiastically asserts that it was worth it and offers some advice for other libraries facing space challenges. "It is important to have strong community support and participation from those who recognize the need for quality library service and who want that for their community. If the need is well articulated, even a bad economic climate can be overcome."



Cultivating Governmental Relationships

Relationships between libraries and their governmental entities range from rosy to rocky. A significant factor in the quality of those relationships seems to be government's level of appreciation of the library, as well as its role in and value to the community.

In our personal lives, we nurture relationships that are important to us. We stay in touch. We let people know we care. We help out when needed. Similar attention is needed to cultivate relationships with governmental officials so that they support and advocate for the library. This is especially important when the library needs capital or increased operational funding.

What can be done to build important relationships?

1. Provide a steady stream of information, especially relative to library usage. In cases where officials don't use the library, they need to know how many people do use it. Educate them about different constituencies and how they use the library, e.g., seniors, out-of-towners, unemployed workers, civic groups. Make the point that the library is important to many people for many different reasons.
2. Get involved in community activities, where you are working side by side with community leaders and have the opportunity to tout the library and its important role in the community. They can be strong advocates and influence government boards and councils.
3. Seek input/counsel from those you wish to cultivate. Invite them to the library before hours for a cup of coffee and ask their advice about a specific issue. Follow up with a "bread and butter" note thanking them for their time and help.
4. Get government board and council members into the library! Involve them in library activities. Invite them to read to the preschoolers or sit in on a board meeting. Ask them for help with resources or find out what their special interests are and plug them into appropriate activities

Building relationships is the responsibility of both board and staff. The stronger the relationships, the more government officials will appreciate the library and the more supportive they will be when it comes to important decisions that affect the library.