Portage County Public Library

Strategic Plan 2019-2021

Adopted 9/5/2018

Portage County Public Library Strategic Plan: 2019-2021

The development of this plan was facilitated by Nathan Sandwick, Portage County UW-Extension Community Development Educator.

Summary

Portage County Public Library enriches our community by connecting people and offering free and equal opportunity for lifelong learning and enjoyment.

At the start of this planning effort the Portage County Public Library invited residents to imagine and express their hopes for Portage County communities. Listed below are several of the themes observed among the key community vision ideas that people shared:

- lifelong learning for personal and professional growth
- access to and awareness of opportunities, services and supports
- opportunities for self-expression
- experience of an inclusive community
- celebration of the community members' heritage, culture, and history

The Portage County Public Library aims to support the community in realizing these and other relevant community vision ideas. Accordingly, this plan identifies Portage County Public Library's four strategic goals for the next three years, through 2021.

- **Goal 1: Community Hub**
  The Library will collaborate with community partners to help people find services and to support creative endeavors.

- **Goal 2: Library Environment**
  The Library environment will be safe, welcoming and suited to meet the needs of library users at each branch location.

- **Goal 3: Outreach**
  The Library will strengthen outreach & marketing efforts to the community to build support and increase awareness of its services.

- **Goal 4: Service to an Active Community**
  The Library will be indispensable to our community by meeting its diverse needs through programming, collections and services.

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Mission, Vision, Values, and Strengths

Adopted with this strategic plan, the Portage County Public Library's mission, vision, values and strengths are as follows:

Our Mission

We enrich our community by connecting people and offering free and equal opportunity for lifelong learning and enjoyment.

Our Vision

We inspire people of all ages with the love of reading, foster lifelong learning, and enhance quality of life. The library connects the community, offers gathering spaces, and inspires creativity and innovation in a welcoming and respectful atmosphere. The library provides access to high-quality materials, resources, programs and customer-focused experiences.

Our Values

- **Accessibility**
- **Inclusiveness**
- **Respect**
- **Trust**
- **Innovation**

Our Strengths

- Accessibility of materials, resources, programs, and experiences that the four branches have to offer.
- Spaces for library users to comfortably meet, study, stay warm, keep cool, get online and recharge.
- Variety of programs for youth and for adults.
- Collections that include a variety of items including books, digital media, games and databases.
- Staff composed of dedicated and versatile professionals who communicate and work as a team to serve library users.
- Supportive patron base, and a good reputation in the community.

"Bad libraries build collections, good libraries build services, great libraries build communities."
~ R. David Lankes

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Goals, Actions, and Desired Outcomes

Goal 1: Community Hub
The Library will collaborate with community partners to help people find services and to support creative endeavors.

Actions	Desired Outcomes
A. Curate and update an organized list of business partners and community resources for the Reference department's use.	A. Strengthened connection with small businesses and community partners in order to help meet the needs of the community.
B. Determine current staff member connections with community organizations.	B. The library and its staff will be equipped to help people find available assistance.
C. Build and maintain relationships with community partners.	C. Newcomers and immigrants get connected to helpful people and service providers. (This outcome also corresponds goals 2 and 4.)
D. Research the need for (and development of) makerspaces and physical or virtual creative spaces (e.g. blog) for library users.	D. People who are marginalized gain access to services. (This outcome also corresponds goals 2 and 4.)
E. Provide support for local writers.	E. Productive collaboration with community groups helps to advance shared goals.
F. Continue to provide neat, orderly and well-managed spaces for community partners to share their information and resources.	
G. Where possible, help community partners meet their stated goals.	

"Library buildings have become a truly neutral place that acts as an anchor of community life and fosters broader, more creative interactions. In these spaces, community groups meet, independent business people work, students collaborate, the curious attend lectures or performances, and people seeking the comfort and energy of being surrounded by others relax, study, or read."
  ~ Wisconsin Library Association's Library Development & Legislation Committee Co-chairs Connie Meyer and Kathy Pletcher, 2018

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Goal 2: Library Environment
The Library environment will be safe, welcoming and suited to meet the needs of library users at each branch location.

Actions	Desired Outcomes
A. Keep annual facilities plans up-to-date. Keep responsible stakeholders engaged. Host annual walkthroughs.	A. Facilities are clean, functional, and modern.
B. Keep facilities clean, organized, functional and in good condition, modern, and appealing.	B. Buildings and amenities support activities that may occur at the library. Library environments encourage library use and community partnerships.
C. Pursue customer service and safety training. Interested staff may participate in safe zone training.	C. Signage helps users find their way easily.
D. Redefine and re-configure service desks to accommodate use of self-checkout stations, and to make it easier for users to find their way.	D. User experiences are favorable.
E. Create new unified signage that helps point to all areas from all major decision points. This should be multilingual signage including braille for hand/eye level signs.	E. People feel that they belong.
	F. The future of library facilities is secure.
	G. Stable staffing with Increased knowledge and ability.
F. Redesign the Main Street garden at the Stevens Point branch to encourage positive engagement and create a safe and welcoming environment.	Note: Outcomes 1.C and 1.D also relate to this goal.
G. Work with host communities to enforce smoking restrictions outside the building and to foster a positive interface with the community.	
H. Keep the "Rules of Use," for meeting rooms and library in general, up-to-date and advertise it to the public.	
I. Work with partners to ensure library meets the needs of users with various types of disabilities.	
J. Survey patrons to determine what would improve the library experience for them.	
K. For staff interested in the Library as a career, provide continuing education opportunities and guidance to build on service to the community and increase their knowledge.	
L. Hire more staff that know non-English languages.	

"The only thing that you absolutely have to know, is the location of the library."
~ Albert Einstein

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Goal 3: Outreach
The Library will strengthen outreach & marketing efforts to the community to build support and increase awareness of its services.

Actions	Desired Outcomes
A. Discover new ways to reach potential library users.	A. Expanded library use among current and new audiences.
B. Reach out and encourage families to use library from birth, as well as community members of all other ages and stages of life.	B. Greater awareness and appreciation for all types of library resources and programs.
C. Ask community partners to promote the library and spread information about what it offers. This will increase our reach into the community.	C. Clarity that library resources, programs, and services support people in their personal, professional and civic pursuits.
D. Increase our visibility and participation in the community.	D. The library reflects and celebrates the diversity of the community.
E. Review, revise, and implement our 2017 marketing plan and pursue branding strategies therein.	E. The library supports lifelong learning with popular resources and programs for people of all ages.
F. Rethink how programs are promoted and advertised to enhance the perception of the library as an educational and impactful community institution. Correlate program outcomes to learning targets and stated goals. Gather testimonials and quotes about the value of the library for use in ads and reports.	F. It is clear to supporters that resources, programs, and services help to advance shared community goals.
G. Advertise and promote new offerings as they become available.	
H. Create a social media procedure and have more staff regularly promote the library through those outlets. Encourage more people to use the library's Facebook page. Keep telling them what makes the library so great, and generate posts that engage users.	

"The public library is more than a repository of books. It's a mysterious, wondrous place with the power to change lives."
~ Chicago Tribune literary editor Elizabeth Taylor

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Goal 4: Service to an Active Community
The Library will be indispensable to our community by meeting its diverse needs through programming, collections and services.

Actions	Desired Outcomes
A. Pursue more community interaction, collaboration, and research to determine what types of new programs and services are needed. B. Enhance and promote library programs that may bolster other important literacy programs. C. Define collection goals in light of community programming and service needs. Review and update policy on collection goals. D. Stay abreast of current issues, opportunities, and emerging technologies to help advance service priorities and expand access (see desired outcomes). E. Develop and practice a procedure to review policies annually and make any needed changes. F. Rethink staffing needs and staff training in order to support more programming.	A. Success in advancing several library service priorities: Lifelong learning, Cultural awareness, Create & share content, Services for new immigrants, and Early literacy. B. Support for all age ranges reflected in community. C. Equal support for people of all backgrounds. D. Library collections, programs and services reflect and support a diverse community. E. Programs relate to underserved audiences, local interests, and local history; and they promote cultural awareness. F. Residents in rural areas have more ways to access library materials more easily. G. Expanded Wi-Fi access for patrons without home Internet connections. H. The library maintains collections that people use, need, and want. I. Increased stakeholder support and funding. Note: Outcomes 1.C and 1.D also relate to this goal.

"Public Libraries are there for people of all ages. At every stage of life, a person can find resources to help them solve problems or improve their own circumstances - often literally transforming their own life."
> *~ Plumer Lovelace, Executive Director of the Wisconsin Library Association*

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Overview of this Strategic Planning Process

A community visioning exercise initiated in February 2018 provided an orientation for this entire planning process. The visioning exercise included a face-to-face visioning session and online survey that was open to the general public. Community stakeholders who attended the event or responded to the survey were invited to establish a set of shared community vision ideas and community strengths *before* turning attention to what roles the library may play in helping to pursue such vision ideas. The initial focus on community vision ideas and needs of the community at-large (before focusing on the library's role) is an important way in which this strategic planning process reflects good planning practices suggested for libraries in <u>Strategic Planning for Results</u> (Nelson, 2008)[1].

After gathering input from community members at-large, a core planning work group of the library's management staff and a small subset of board members set to work on developing the library's strategic plan. Notably the work group identified library service priorities and current goals, as well as outcomes and measures for each goal. Prior to the core planning work group's determination of goals, outcomes and measures, the library's organizational strengths and values and two challenging questions (strategic challenges) were identified by staff over the course of two regularly-scheduled staff meetings. The planning work group considered the two challenging questions that were posed by staff. Discussion about these questions informed specification of desired outcomes and actions chosen in order to advance library goals associated with these questions. Library planning discussions and the initial visioning exercise were facilitated by a UW-Extension community development educator.

In preparing this plan, library staff considered relevant goals and objectives of the Portage County Master Strategic Plan (2017-2021) which had been updated and presented to the County Board of Supervisors in 2017. Library responses to the Portage County Master Strategic Plan are summarized in an appendix.

Commitment to Monitor Progress

This plan indicates the strategic actions that the Portage County Public Library will pursue in order to advance each of its four main goals. Each goal includes a list of desired outcomes that add clarity. The library will gauge progress using such measures in order to evaluate progress toward desired outcomes.

Commitment to Review and Update this Strategic Plan

The Board of Trustees of the Portage County Public Library is committed to keeping this plan up-to-date. The Board of Trustees will review progress reports approximately 6 months and 12 months after adoption of this plan, and annually thereafter. Upon review and reflection of implementation efforts and results, this plan may be revised to reflect emerging issues, opportunities, and insights. As updates occur, the date of the latest revision will be noted in the revised document.

[1] Sandra S. Nelson. *Strategic Planning For Results* (Public Library Association; Indiana Publishing House, 2008).

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Appendix A: Portage County Public Library responses to the Portage County Master Strategic Plan - 2017-2021

1. **Facilitate & Strengthen County-Wide Community & Economic Development**

   As part of the Master Plan (1C), the Library strives to maintain and improve the quality of life with & for Portage County Citizens through materials, resources and facilities.

2. **Provide Needed Functional, Flexible County Facilities**

   As part of the Master Plan (2A), the Library will continue to assess and improve its physical needs at all branch locations in coordination with the Facilities Department and other County entities.

3. **Streamline & Improve County Services & Processes**

   As part of the Master Plan (3A), the Library will continue to seek ways to leverage technology to improve service & communication.

   As part of the Master Plan (3B), the Library will improve our ability to make prompt organizational decisions based on real-time data.

   As part of the Master Plan (3C), the Library will continue to seek to improve citizen access to library services through an on-line presence.

   As part of the Master Plan (3D), the Library continues to seek responsible organizational efficiencies and planning.

   As part of the Master Plan (3E), the Library seeks to improve efficiency and effectiveness of governance by updating policies and procedures to improve performance of the library and tear down barriers to services.

4. **Attract, Develop & Retain A Highly Skilled, Professional Workforce**

   As part of the Master Plan (4A), the Library will clarify and maintain an external and internal public service culture.

   As part of the Master Plan (4C), the Library will develop strategies for talent attraction and retention that meet the competency needs of the organization.

   As part of the Master Plan (4D) the Library will develop professional development standards and competency pathways for employees.

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Appendix B: Preliminary List of Challenging Questions

The following challenging questions were developed at the all staff meeting on March 8th, 2018 and discussed as part of the planning process.

Group 1	• How is it that the library at Stevens Point provides space for programs and a lot of meetings with heavy attendance and parking availability is limited at the same time?
Group 2	• How is it that the library preserves the past and supports the future? • How is it that the library is a county department (team) and is unique and separate?
Group 3	• How is it that the library, which is beloved by Portage Co. residents, is funded adequately during lean budget times? • How can the library serve people who want it to be quiet and people whose condition (young age, disability, etc.) makes them naturally noisy? (especially at Plover, Almond, & Rosholt where we do not have study rooms and/or programming rooms) • How is it that the library can provide shelter for people who need it (homeless) and also continue to provide a family friendly atmosphere for families? How do we meet the needs of specific populations and the general public? • How can the library maintain its collection and incur rising costs in a 0% increase environment?
Group 4	• How is it that the library wants lots of patrons & events but parking and bus service is sometimes inadequate? • How can the library be an open and welcoming space for people experiencing homelessness and also help make patrons feel comfortable around them? • How is it that the library has so many resources yet many don't know about them or how to use them? • How is it that the library is welcoming to all and a safe space to all? How is it that the library will let anyone come through our doors, but that means we can be letting <u>anyone</u> through our doors...
Group 5	• How do we maintain being a welcome space for all patrons while addressing people's concerns about homeless patrons and inattentive child supervisors? - Balance being welcoming, safe & comfortable for all patrons. • How can the library be more automated/self-service and personal?

Group 6	• How is it that the library is a borrowing entity and have patrons feel responsible for replacing what they break or misplace?
	• How might the library…
	    o Promote staff independence while ensuring that essential functions take place?
	    o Serve local needs while promoting an understanding of national & global issues?
	    o Promote/honor/assist with old and new formats and technology at the same time?

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