

Toward Vital, Valuable Public Library Services in 2020
A Report for the Fairfax County Public Library
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Executive Summary

This report presents recommendations created for the Fairfax County Public Library to help ensure the continuation of vital, valuable public services throughout the next decade. Because factors critical to the library's success are, for the most part, beyond its control, the approach offered is one of recommended processes, designed to support the library's continuing growth as a supple, creative public institution. The focus on building institutional capacity within the framework of continuing to create public value for county residents focuses on four critical aspects of library operations:

- I. Ensuring high value library services
- II. Ensuring customer centered priorities in planning and communication
- III. Securing stable, adequate funding
- IV. Ensuring well qualified, enthusiastic staff at all levels.

Recommendations for each area follow.

I. Ensure High Value Library Services

1, *To ensure vital, valuable library services, FCPL should develop a clear statement of purpose for each service in its current portfolio.*

2. *A plan for evaluating services in relation to the stated goals should be developed and implemented, in addition to continuing to collect the more traditional extensiveness and efficiency (cost per program/ per user, etc) data.*

3. *It is recommended that an incremental process be put in place as follows:*

- * Create a list of all library services.
- * For each service, state the goal in terms of educational benefits for the intended users.
- * Select and prioritize services for comprehensive attention.
- * Implement one easy example to learn the model and ensure an early success.

* Calendar full “service review” treatments for all library services to be completed within two years.

4. *To ensure that the existing mix of services remains valuable and appropriate, regular reviews of each service should be conducted.*

5. *It is further recommended that FCPL create a Service Review Calendar to schedule a comprehensive examination for each library service at appropriate intervals.*

6. *It is recommended that most of this service review procedure be done in-house utilizing staff working groups.*

7. *Finally, staff members who deliver services should be trained to become effective ambassadors for their services.*

II. Ensure Customer Centered Planning and Communication

8. *It is recommended that planning for FCPL continue to be conducted in terms of customers’ lifestyles.*

9. *It is recommended that communication about library services be focused by targeting categories of potential library users.*

10. *To ensure vital, valuable public library services in 2020, wherever possible, FCPL leaders must frame what they are doing and for whom specifically enough to link the presumed benefits of public expenditures with the well-being of the community. They also must be able to demonstrate the results actually happen.*

III. Ensure Stable, Adequate Funding

11. *It is recommended that FCPL move as many services as possible into a “necessity” framework, clearly stating their purposes in terms of shared understanding of rights, designing and delivering them based on research proven models, and constantly monitoring outcomes, costs, and adequacy of administrative oversight.*

12. *It is recommended that library administration, working with the library’s Board of Directors, the Foundation administration, and the Foundation’s Board of Directors re-visit the allocation of public and private funds to various programs in light of their understanding of whether such programs are managed and understood as amenities or as necessities.*

13. *It is recommended that FCPL consider offsetting the cost of providing high levels of customer convenience by charging user fees*

14. *It is further recommended that the library actively seek grant funding to support innovations in service delivery*

IV. Ensure Excellent, Appropriate Human Resources

15. *Develop leadership training opportunities throughout the organization using current staff as trained mentors.*

16. *Adopt a program to acquaint staff throughout the library system with current widely used consumer technologies.*

17. *Periodically review all position descriptions in relation to planned modifications in service delivery, ensuring that they include the skills required to do the job well, not just the skills of those who currently hold or have recently held the position.*

Introduction

Public libraries are local institutions created and funded by local governments to serve the people who live in their jurisdictions. Libraries tailor their resources and services to meet the particular needs of the people who live in their service areas. If significant numbers of people in a library's service area read and speak Korean, library collections probably include books and magazines written in Korean. If a wave of job losses hits the community, the library may organize a Job Center to help laid off workers get help of all kinds finding new positions. Making the decisions to ensure a thriving future for any public library system is principally a local matter, determined by local conditions and circumstances. While decisions must be made locally they will be significantly influenced by changes coming from the wider environment.

This report is prepared for the Fairfax County Public Library as it serves the residents of this particular county now and in the future, offering strategies to guide skillful decision making in the face of local threats and opportunities as well as broad national trends. The report is also prepared at a time of a widespread recession, making data gathered in earlier, more stable times of limited use. The focus is therefore, on recommended processes for library administration and management, rather than on predictions about the factors which influence the viability of public libraries.

The Fairfax County Public Library (FCPL) serves residents of a large (1 million+), diverse (1 in 4 residents born outside the US), relatively affluent (median household income \$105,000), well educated (almost 60% of adult residents have at least 4 years of college) county adjoining Washington DC. Its 23 branches are heavily used. Last year (2008) there were almost 6 million visits to library buildings, plus another 4 million to the library's web site. Over 13 million items were borrowed. Seven and a half thousand programs brought 189,000 people together to learn. All of this happened for the low cost of less than \$30 per capita.

It is clear FCPL works carefully and consistently to mesh services and resources with the interests and needs of county residents. The heavy use of the library is understood as a mark of great success by the county's government. This report recommends ways to build on the library's current strength to ensure the existence of a vital, valuable library system a decade hence.

Time and chance affect public libraries as well as the communities they serve. FCPL is no exception. Throughout the county's period of remarkable growth new libraries were built to serve the people moving in. As technologies for delivering learning resources changed, the library added materials in new formats for residents with special needs as well as for traditional customers. Internet availability radically modified library services. From offering classes so people could learn to find online information, to providing free internet access for those who need it, to licensing proprietary databases to make them available at no charge, FCPL has adapted and adopted strategies to ensure relevant resources and services keep flowing to all.

Circumstances critical to the vital functioning of public libraries often lie beyond the control of local civic and professional leadership.

- * Laws are changed and challenged in Richmond and Washington reflecting new societal fears and concerns.
- * Events such as 9/11 require shifts in public funding priorities.
- * Businesses open and close, affecting tax revenues as well as county population trends.
- * Technology evolves, changing the ways people communicate, send and receive information, and spend their time.
- * Innovations create new tools for library managers as well as require fresh financial management strategies.

Skillful decision making in the midst of so many uncontrollable conditions requires establishing and maintaining supple, smart organizations---a significant challenge when combined with the safeguards and restrictions inherent in public administration. By offering a set of places to pay attention in the coming decade, consistent with public finance and administration theory, this report suggests a path for FCPL leaders toward continuously vital, valuable services for county residents despite changes in external and local circumstances.

Fairfax County is exceptional and award winning in its countywide commitment to data-based decision making. Reports are available extensively documenting currently provided county services. County administrators look ahead, identifying trends that may influence county services in the future, such as increased traffic congestion, decreased

dependence on direct federal government employment, and increasing numbers of “teleworkers.”

To be embedded in such a smart administrative structure is a gift. FCPL contributes to this richness, as well as benefiting from it. Library users are surveyed, library uses are counted, services are evaluated, and expenditures are closely tracked. Attention to data and accountability for using information in decision making is widespread in the library. Data are examined by branch managers and department heads as well as by system level administrators. FCPL is arguably one of the best managed library systems in the country, and the only one to house an in-house Office of Planning and Evaluation. (See Appendix A.)

The library’s abundant data and numerous analytic reports are helpful in understanding the past and the present, but alone are not a sufficient foundation for looking ahead. For public libraries, the years between the present and 2020 undoubtedly will be somewhat like past years... toddlers will still love stories with repetition and rhyme, children will still need resources for school assignments, seniors will appreciate learning about things they finally have time to consider. Existing data can help manage gradual adjustments in such traditional library services.

However, much will change and no one can predict exactly how. The current global recession was anticipated by only a few generally ignored economists. No one now knows how deeply it will cut or how long it will last. This unforeseen financial disaster has had a huge impact on Fairfax County government as well as on other jurisdictions throughout the land. For FCPL the result is the greatest reduction in staff and services in the library’s history coupled with increased use of remaining resources.

The following report is not based on predictions in technology, funding, or culture. Incremental changes in these areas can be dealt with as they arise by savvy, data driven managers. Radical changes almost always arrive unexpectedly, rendering predictions futile, whether hopeful or grim. The greatest asset for handling great or gradual changes in the library’s environment is a smart, supple organization. The following recommendations support long-term increases in organizational capacity, helping FCPL’s civic and professional leaders plan where and how to pay attention in the

coming years to ensure the continuation of the vital, valuable library services enjoyed by county residents today.

“Vital” library services are characterized by both necessity (as in vital organs) and by a high level of energy i.e. organizational vitality. “Valuable” publicly funded services as laid out in the work of Mark Moore of the Kennedy School at Harvard, are significant for the people who use them, reflect the positive will of public policy people and administrators who authorize and appropriate funds for them, and make good use of their public funds.

To guarantee vital, valuable public library services for Fairfax County residents, attention is recommended to four major facets of the library’s work:

1. Ensuring *high value library services*
2. Ensuring *customer centered priorities in planning and communication.*
3. Securing *stable, adequate funding.*
4. Ensuring *well qualified, enthusiastic staff* at all levels.

The following sections of the report address these four facets of FCPL’s work.

Public libraries are a significant part of the American dream. Their existence affirms our commitment to the essential work of life long learning, and perhaps more importantly, to assuring that all who live here have equitable opportunities to create successful lives, participate in democratic decision making, and live respectfully with one another. This means....

- * all babies and young children have the chance to grow up in book rich environments so they enter school ready to read;
- * all students have materials available to support and extend their classroom work;
- * all people can get the information they need to make good decisions, whether about how to “green” their homes, find a competent doctor, or plan for retirement;
- * all entrepreneurs can locate new markets, discover how to improve their products, or keep accurate financial records.
- * all citizens can learn about candidates for office, the actions of their governments, and the issues inviting civic attention; and that

* people of all ages can find delight in cultural resources...art, music, poems, plays, and stories.

I. Ensure High Value Library Services

Each public library develops, maintains, and offers its community a portfolio of services believed to be useful to them. Some services are traditional...books to borrow, story hours for children, reference services, and public programs come to mind. Some services are innovative, or were when they began...English language classes for New Americans, electronic gaming for teens, and downloadable e-books and music.

Each service in the portfolio requires specific resources, serves specific people, and hopefully accomplishes a legitimate public purpose. Preschool story hours, for example, require skillful staff, preparation time, effective marketing, and dedicated space within the library. Accompanied by parents and caregivers, preschoolers come, have a pleasant time, and usually go home with piles of books. The public purposes behind preschool stories and books are to provide introductory language and social skills for children and to extend their learning experiences by making books available for parents and caregivers to read at home. Research shows that children who are read with enter school ready to learn and have a head start on success. Providing equitable, free access for all children to a resource that increases their chance of succeeding in school is valuable to the public at large, not just to the participating children and their parents.

Three factors determine the mix of library services appropriate and valuable for a specific community. In the United States, legislation authorizing public libraries is done at the state level, despite the fact that primary financial support comes from local government in most states. Authorizing legislation reflects the aspirations of state residents for public funding of something they believe is important for all. For public libraries in Virginia the establishment legislation is:

“It is hereby declared to be the policy of the Commonwealth, as a part of its provision for public education, to promote the establishment and development of public library service throughout its various political subdivisions.” (Code 1950, &42-23; 1870, c. 606)

For this legislation to make sense, one must assume legislators use the familiar terms “public education” in a way that encompasses life long learning, not just the formal education offered in K-12 systems. The sociologist Robert Bellah has written that “...institutions are socially organized ways of paying attention.” Clearly, Virginia’s legislators believed supporting life long learning is important for residents of the Commonwealth, not just K-12 formal schooling. Historically, however, state legislators have left the funding of public libraries to local governments.

At the local level, Fairfax County policy makers and administrators have seemed to understand education as the purview of the K-12 system. Libraries are recognized as contributors for homework help, but their support of life long learning goes fairly unrecognized. FCPL uses, measured in 2006, would seem to validate a view of the institution as a provider of resources for “leisure reading or personal interest” (61%) far more frequently than for other purposes (17% for homework or class related materials and information, 7% for work related materials). Nevertheless, the public library system is considered a valuable part of county government.

In Virginia, to be considered congruent with their authorizing legislation and in harmony with the understandings of local financial appropriators, services in the library’s portfolio should serve life long learning/educational purposes. This is the first factor in determining what services FCPL should offer.

Next, the services in the mix must be understood to be substantively valuable by those who use them, as well as by those who oversee their delivery. The costs of service delivery also must seem reasonable. Preschool story hours are widely understood as valuable community resources, but if it takes ten hours of staff time to prepare a story hour program and only two or three children come, overseers will assume something isn’t right. While the service is valuable, the costs are too high. To meet the test of being substantively valuable at a reasonable cost, either the story hour should serve more children or involve less costly preparation.

Finally, every service in the portfolio must be perceived as operationally and administratively feasible. The library must be able to plan it, execute it well, and understand its impact. For example, if library management allows a preschool story hour program space to become so crowded with eager children that it becomes chaotic, despite

the high number of children in attendance it has failed the “operationally feasible” test and is no longer publicly valuable. Reasonable attendance and a well designed and delivered program indicate the library is on top of the situation managerially and administratively.

Library managers have three responsibilities in relation to the services in their portfolios:

- * to ensure that the offered services are needed and used as intended;
- * to understand how much it costs to provide them; and
- * to evaluate their effectiveness in relation to established program goals and institutional mission.

The Fairfax County Public Library offers many kinds of services to many people. (See Appendix B) From a public administration viewpoint, all may not be equally valuable as outputs of public funding. Some cost more per use than others. Some merely create convenience for customers while others provide the only access to necessary resources. Some have clear educational value. For others the learning component may be less apparent. This time of drastic budget reductions invites library managers and overseers to review the entire portfolio, making cuts where services are less valuable and preserving those of greater public value. These times also invite library managers strategically to prepare for the longer term future by absorbing some cuts by reducing resources and services they believe will be less vital in 2020 while ensuring the others continue to thrive.

To ensure vital, valuable library services, FCPL should develop a clear statement of purpose for each service in its current portfolio. The service’s life long learning component should be evident in each statement. What kind of learning is supported and for whom? If the public good of what is learned is not widely understood, the service goal should be linked to one which is. When public libraries began to offer electronic gaming resources for teens, the goal of providing this service was not widely understood by the public, many of whom saw electronic games as primarily recreational. Alert librarians became good at explaining to funders and to the media that studies show teens learn valuable skills by participating in electronic gaming, demonstrating that the library was faithful to its role as supporting learning in the community in adding this service.

A plan for evaluating services in relation to the stated goals should be developed and implemented, in addition to continuing to collect the more traditional extensiveness and efficiency (cost per program/ per user, etc) data.

For example, the goal for preschool story hours might be to increase the pre-reading skills of Fairfax County children ages 0-5 so they enter school ready to succeed. A framework for the service evaluation would then consist of locating the research on effective reading readiness programs and demonstrating the compliance of FCPL's work with the key components required to produce increases in reading readiness. Statistics about the extensiveness of participation and costs of such services would complete the evaluation picture.

The public library community has often objected to suggestions that it base library practice on research about effective learning and information seeking, rightly noting that money to conduct such research is never in library budgets. As a community of practice, however, we do not need to do original research. We merely need to identify existing research in other fields (youth development, English language learning, etc.) and design our services to comply with their findings. For a profession committed to the value of information in decision making, commitment to research-based practice should be a natural custom.

Given the number of services in FCPL's portfolio, undertaking an examination of each one in terms of goal, appropriateness of strategies, extensiveness of participation, and costs of service delivery will require considerable time and expertise. For this to be manageable in times of serious funding losses, *it is recommended that an incremental approach to implementing the process be put in place as follows:*

- * Create a list of all library services.
- * For each service, state the goal in terms of life long learning benefits for the intended users.
- * Select and prioritize services for comprehensive attention.
- * Implement one easy example to learn the model and ensure an early success.
- * Calendar full "service review" treatments for all library services to be completed within two years.

To ensure that the existing mix of services remains valuable and appropriate, regular reviews of each service should be conducted. Such a process would be the service equivalent of zero based budgeting and might be undertaken in conjunction with the budget process. Once the service evaluation system is set up, all services need not be reviewed each year, but none should escape comprehensive review for more than three or four years. A check list of questions such as the following could serve as the template for service reviews by library managers.

- * Does our service model reflect the current research on effectiveness?
- * Are there other ways to deliver this service? New technologies?
Different staffing patterns? Community partnerships?
- * Is the use of this service going up or down?
- * Are there changes in the county demographics that affect either the current use or projected use of this service?
- * Is the cost of delivering this service still appropriate?
- * Does this service presently invite fine tuning, major adjustment, or elimination to ensure the library overall remains vital and valuable?

It is further recommended that FCPL create a Service Review Calendar to schedule a comprehensive examination for each existing library service at appropriate intervals. Following a staff administrative examination, the outcome of the scheduled service review would be a matter for consideration by the library's Board of Trustees so relevant policies might be amended or affirmed as appropriate.

It is recommended that most of this service review procedure be done in-house utilizing staff working groups. The groups should be composed of those who deliver the service and know the most about it as well as others with system-wide perspectives who may be less likely to be uncritical champions and defenders of present practices. Serving on staff service review groups will deepen members' understanding of the work as well as cultivate openness to changes or modifications that may seem appropriate.

Finally, staff members who deliver services should be trained to become effective ambassadors for their services. With increased understanding of the why and how of

their service delivery models, staff can become the best outreach links to the community, especially to potential users and to potential supporters.

It is recommended that adding services to the library's portfolio require adherence to process clearly identifying the learning/educational purpose of the proposed project, who it would serve, how its design accords with relevant research, and how much it will be estimated to cost. The “proposed service addition” form would require written answers to such questions as:

- * Who is this service for?
- * What kinds of things might they learn by using it?
- * Where else in the library's portfolio of services might they now get such information?
- * What is known about how people get such information/learning?
- * How would this service be designed to conform to known research?
- * What resources will it require? How much will they cost?
- * Why should public money pay for this service addition?
- * How will the extensiveness, efficiency, and effectiveness of this service be evaluated?

Implementing these recommendations will take substantial effort and time. A supple, smart library system will result, ready for both predictable and unpredictable changes to its practice environment in years ahead. Each service FCPL offers will be rooted in research and best practices, its goals will be clear, the effectiveness of the program in meeting the goals will be understood, and its costs will be known.

As a profession, we have too long assumed “the library” is a whole package, primarily a building filled with books and staff. This “portfolio of services” understanding invites greater rigor in what and how libraries offer services, promises a defensible, effective use of public funds, and offers a flexible structure to review, add, or eliminate services for managers committed to vital, valuable public library services.

II. Ensure Customer Centered Planning and Communication

Public library use is not an end in itself. While librarians often talk about program goals in language like, “let's have some more programs to get people into the

library,” they know better. Community members use public library resources *for* something that is important to them, important enough to get in the car and come to the library or to turn on the computer and go to the library’s web site. They may come to understand treatment options for an illness they have developed. They may come for information about their investments. They may come to attend a class. They may come to hear a favorite author speak. They may come for free high quality time with their children. There are many, many reasons people use online and traditional library resources. Their reasons rather than our resources should be front and center in the library’s planning and communication.

As a profession, public librarianship has moved a bit beyond the earlier enshrining of an “everything for everyone” understanding of service, but there is a way to go. FCPL knows more than most library systems about what brings people to seek out its resources. (Appendix C) While the library and the librarians may know many of the reasons people use the library, most people in the county haven’t a clue who uses the library and why. The problem in this isn’t that they don’t know more about their neighbors. The opportunity is that when they don’t know how others use the public library, they don’t understand all the reasons and ways they, themselves, could benefit by using library resources. They also have, for the most part, incomplete understandings of the value the public library provides for county residents.

It is recommended that planning for FCPL continue to be conducted in terms of customers’ lifestyles and life stages. Presently branches in the system designate for each of five age groups (preschool, school age, teens, adults, and older adults) whether they will provide a core (i.e. basic) level of services or enhanced services, as well as the level of effort which will be assigned to the branches’ roles as a community center and a resource for “living in the U. S.” Decisions are made at the branch level based on neighborhood demographics, library uses, and feedback from communities.

This customized approach to designing services could be enhanced by breaking down age groups according to lifestyle factors. For example, in planning services for school age children, service designers can ask how formal education support services might be customized for home schoolers, high achievers, children with learning disabilities, and/or children from homes where English is rarely spoken. There are many

ways to sub-divide adult learners: information seekers and leisure readers; hobbyists and scholars; people skilled in using technology and people who are not, etc. Customer centered planning should include an exercise of asking how services might be designed so various kinds of learners in each age group are certain to get what they need with as few barriers as possible.

It is recommended that communication about library services be focused by targeting categories of potential library users. If one currently Googles “resources for families in Fairfax County” FCPL does not appear in the search results. Yet we know the library has multiple resources for families confronting various stages and circumstances in their lives. If the library’s web page had a category “Resources for...” and “families” was one item on the list, along with “students,” “teens,” and “new Americans,” a county resident seeking information would know the library could help. Clustering all manner of family resources and services from programs to selected book titles and recommended web sites behind this link would lead the seeker to rich sources of help. Resource clusters could similarly be offered for other groups of people.

The web site is, of course, the most flexible tool the library has to cluster services of interest to people with shared circumstances which might predict needs for similar resources. Overall marketing of library resources and services, whether by flyers, print announcements, or media, would be stronger if addressed to specific groups of users. Cross marketing, leading people from one kind of resource to another related one, would also strengthen the public’s awareness of the wealth of materials and services held and offered on their behalf. This might mean, for instance, at a program featuring a historian, hand outs addressed to “history buffs” would be available listing recommended web sites, selected books and journals, as well as additional coming programs and community groups.

Librarians hate to pigeon-hole customers by assuming their shared needs as this recommendation may appear to do. It is safe to say, however, that people attracted to library resources using a “clustered interests and services” approach will not hesitate to use other resources they discover. People who never think of using a library because they don’t understand what is available *for them* won’t find library resources at all.

There is a second element found in public finance theory of why it can be important to manage from the customer centered focus. Whether a library service, or any publicly funded service, is considered an *amenity* (nice to have and perhaps OK to fund based on economies of scale) or a *necessity* (everyone has the right to have it) is a function of what is being done for whom and why. Customer centered service planning strengthens a library's place in the queue for public funding, more likely to be considered a necessity than an amenity if the some principles are understood.

Overall guidance for the work of public libraries in Virginia is supplied by the educational stipulation in legislation and the commitment to life long learning evidenced in local appropriations. In addition, there are some things the public understands as appropriately funded by their tax dollars and others less so. The heated national political conversation about internet filtering in libraries clearly indicates there are few universal understandings, but there are some principles one can invite for clarification.

Funding for public libraries fits in the public finance category of “the publicly funded distribution of private goods.” Public dollars, required by, not donated to governments, are allocated for such purposes because of alleged benefits (positive externalities in the language of the economists) for the public at large, not just for the individual who consumes the service provided. For example, public health services are funded because healthy communities are better for us all, including those who can afford to buy their health care and therefore don't use public health services. Libraries put more learning resources and services into the public sphere than would be there if community members could only use what they could afford to buy. Communities with knowledgeable people have the tools to make better personal and business decisions, a benefit to us all.

Some publicly funded goods and services are understood as more valuable than others, and therefore more worthy of receiving taxpayer support. A messy political process usually determines who gets what in the end, but some principles apply.

- * The more necessary an outcome is for the good of all, the greater the claim on public funds, and its corollary:
- * The less necessary an outcome is for the good of all, the less claim the service has on public funds.

* The stronger the connection between the public investment and the stated service outcome, the greater the claim on public funds, and its corollary:

* The weaker the connection between the public investment and the stated outcome, the weaker the claim on public funds.

Fire departments are seen by local funders as a public necessity. Using the above principles, this status is easy to understand. Without effective fire departments, one person's burning home easily becomes a disaster for all as the fire spreads. A fire that can be extinguished before spreading is a necessary outcome for the well being of the community. Further, the connection between the community's investment in adequate fire equipment and well trained fire personnel is evident every time they are called out. Good equipment and well trained fire fighters mean fires are contained effectively.

Moving those principles to the world of the public library, they suggest that those services which contribute to conditions understood as necessary for the good life for all in Fairfax County are higher priorities for county funding and the library's attention. They also suggest that the more the outcomes of library service can be demonstrated to directly tie to the assumed rights of all in Fairfax County, the higher priority library services will become.

For example, to return to the case of preschool story hours. Managed and understood as a service benefiting only those who attend, story hours may be considered *amenities* by public funders. A stronger case for their support can be made. In a county dominated by well educated people, it can be fairly assumed that there is public support for equitable, excellent educational opportunities to be available to all children. Preschool story hours can be managed and offered as a library service reflecting the county-wide commitment to ensuring that *all children in Fairfax County enter school ready to learn*. In this framing, they are a *necessary* county service. To be credible in this framework, however, library administrators must be able to demonstrate that the services offered by the library in support of preschool literacy development actually make a significant contribution. This is not an issue of spin, it's an issue of research based practice furthering access to a right assumed to be held by all. The investment of public dollars must actually result in children better prepared to read.

To ensure vital, valuable public library services in 2020, wherever possible, FCPL leaders should frame what they are doing and for whom specifically enough to link the presumed benefits of public expenditures with the well-being of the community. They also must be able to demonstrate that the intended results actually happen. Why should the public fund a job center if there is no evidence to indicate that it effectively helps laid off employees find new work? Why should online access to proprietary databases be funded if they are not used to further learning that contributes to scholarship or better decisions?

As a profession, public librarians have been so committed to a fuzzily lofty goal of “providing informational resources to everyone for every reason with no questions asked in order to protect the user’s privacy” that we have forgotten that “everything for everyone” is not a compelling case for securing and spending public dollars. In good times libraries have not suffered, but in hard times they have, claiming to be a public necessity while behaving like an amenity. It’s time to change that...and it’s possible to do so.

III. Ensure Stable, Adequate Funding

Public Funds

If an institution provides needed services of high public value and executes them well that should be enough to warrant a steady flow of public funds. It isn’t. Unless public institutions have independent taxing authority they are constantly competing with one another for shares of the finite fiscal pie available in their jurisdiction. That competition is often framed formally or informally in terms of necessities vs. amenities, as noted above.

In the struggles for appropriated public funding, libraries have several advantages. Most people either love their public libraries or love the idea of living in a community with good public libraries whether they use it themselves or not. Thousands of people in Fairfax County do use FCPL and love the services they receive. Other county residents love the library even if they don’t use it personally, believing it is an important public service.

It is a truth of public administration that services are more willingly supported if those who pay for them also use them or could if they chose to do so. This makes the funding lot of libraries easy, compared, for instance, to the lot of public housing where those who fund the service are rarely those who use it.

The funding position of public libraries is also favored by the fact that many understand libraries as an important asset for the children of the county. For years savvy advocates have used language about libraries as investments in the communities' youth to pass bond and other referenda. Even when times are tight, even if a household doesn't have children at home, people are reluctant to cut services they believe are beneficial for children.

Libraries are less competitive, however, when the language of debate and decision switches to whether they are necessary services like fire and police, or amenities like parks. This is where the management framework recommended earlier comes into play.

If a library's services have been allowed to be managed and communicated simply as "everything for everybody," they are clearly an amenity, as understood in public administration. They are a convenience, nice to have, but not urgent to provide. If, however, public consensus has been obtained to the effect that "every child in Fairfax County has a right to enter kindergarten ready to learn to read," cutting funds for preschool library resources becomes the removal of a right, not the disappearance of an amenity.

It is recommended that FCPL move as many services as possible into a "necessity" framework, clearly stating their purposes in terms of shared understandings of Fairfax County citizens' rights, designing and delivering them based on research proven models, and constantly monitoring outcomes and costs.

FCPL is commended for the close working relationship it has established with county government. From the smart move of locating the library's administrative headquarters in the county office building instead of in a library, to offering library staff and resources to help with county initiatives, the library clearly demonstrates that it has understood what it means to be an integral part of county services. This close working relationship should continue to be fostered and will contribute to funders' perceptions of the value of offering excellent resources and services to County residents.

Private Funds

The Fairfax Library Foundation, together with several Friends of the Library groups take major responsibility for raising private funds to augment public support of the library. In 2007, they gave almost \$400,000 to the library to support several specific programs including online tutoring, the summer reading program, and author programs. In 2008 the Foundation supported a similar array of library activities and events, as well as this study. These funds are useful to the library and are the result of a lot of hard work.

To an outsider, it seems that tradition rather than public policy rationale dictates which library programs are supported by public funds and which by private. This may not be the strongest position for the library when approaching representatives of either kind of funding.

It is recommended that library administration, working with the library's Board of Trustees, the Foundation administration, and the Foundation's Board of Directors re-visit the allocation of public and private funds to various programs in light of their understanding of whether such programs are managed and understood as amenities or as necessities. It is more appropriate that public funds support public necessities and private funds support amenities. Public funds are customarily more stable, ensuring that services they support persist for as long as they are useful. Private funds can vary greatly from year to year. If they support services considered to be amenities, it may be more acceptable to cease offering a service if the funds are not available. It also may be a more compelling case for private donors to learn that if they don't supply the funds, a service they care about won't be provided at all.

Fees for Convenience

Fairfax County Public Library has a long tradition of free public library services, as have most American public libraries. It is important that a tax supported public institution, designed to serve a group of eligible users, not suddenly begin charging fees merely because of constraints in its funding. The current constraints in the library's funding, however, do offer the opportunity to re-visit the rationales for free service to see if adjustments could or should be made.

Public library leaders, in their commitment to free services, appear to have assumed money rather than time is the primary barrier to equitable access to information

and learning resources. In every local jurisdiction there are residents who have more money than time and others who have more time than money. People in the first “more money” category are accustomed to using some of their money to buy time and convenience. They pay people to clean their houses, cook their food, and sometimes even to do their errands. It could reasonably be assumed that such people would also pay fees to increase the convenience of their access to library resources. They might be willing to pay to have books delivered to their homes or offices, to be apprised of new resources in subjects they care about, to have a children’s librarian pre-select appropriate books for their toddlers and mail them a new batch each week, etc.

It is recommended that FCPL consider offsetting the cost of providing high levels of customer convenience by charging user fees. In addition to the kinds of delivery and service examples above, fees could be considered for using more than a set amount of resources (time on a library computer, numbers of picture books checked out, etc.). Such fees could also be couched in terms of users’ convenience. For example, it is more convenient to be able to borrow 20 picture books for one’s toddler than to borrow just 10 and have to return in a week to borrow 10 more. A serious exploration of user fees should take into consideration the following principles:

- * Fees are most likely to be accepted by the public if they are understood to be for new services. Presenting “convenience fees” could be done in this framework.
- * Fees charged should be able to be understood as reasonable in relation to the cost of providing the service.
- * Fees should be easy enough to collect so the cost of administering the fee based services would at least be covered completely.
- * Fees should not be charged if doing so impairs the social objectives of providing the service in the first place.
- * The rationales for charging particular fees should be well known by all front line staff when they are implemented.
- * No library resources should be restricted to fee based access. County residents should always be able to invest more of their own time to

use such services at no cost if they either can't or choose not to pay the fee for convenience.

Grant Funds

It is further recommended that the library actively seek grant funding to support innovations in service delivery. There is virtually no margin for error in the expenditure of public money. Taxpayers are not happy if their money is used for an experiment in service delivery that doesn't work out as planned. On the other hand, foundations and such institutions as the Institute for Museum and Library Services target the development of innovations for grant making, usually with a multi-year grant cycle so adequate time can be spent planning and evaluating results. This is a kind of support for innovation rarely available in the course of regular local public funding cycles.

For FCPL to remain vital and valuable, it must secure a stable and creative mix of public and private funding to deliver essential services well, to deliver "extras" valued by many county residents, and to support continuous innovation.

IV. Ensure Excellent, Appropriate Human Resources

The most expensive part of any public library operation is its staff. Fairfax County Public Library is no exception. Fully 78% of its annual budget in 2009 is set aside to fund the organization's personnel. Unfortunately, this means that when major budget cuts are required, the personnel budget is the only place significant savings can be found. As this report is being developed, FCPL is facing the largest budget cuts in its history, the greatest portion of them coming from the personnel budget. This leaves the remaining staff trying to maintain services with fewer people to help answer questions, check out materials, and re-shelve returned books. This would be a significant enough challenge if library use stayed flat, but use is increasing as people, responding to their own reduced finances, are taking more advantage of free library materials and services. Managers are making creative plans to manage the required personnel cuts with as little impact on the public as possible. This is an overwhelming immediate challenge not likely to disappear any time soon.

Looking toward 2020 there are other personnel challenges:

- * Almost 40% of the staff will be eligible to retire, including many senior level administrators and managers.
- * Leading public libraries requires a number of skills different from those involved in being a good front line librarian, but new leaders are usually sought by moving front line librarians up the system with little or no training in leadership work.
- * Continuous developments in technologies used by the library require continually updated skills for all staff.
- * Innovation in consumer information technologies require staff skills and understandings to plan the library's information services delivery strategies in ways compatible with consumers' desired access modes.

Addressing these longer term personnel issues will require the allocation of time, a resource in short supply due to the current funding crisis. Understand that the looming personnel cuts may make them challenging, the following strategies are suggested.

FCPL has had no trouble attracting new employees, in part because the system's professional positions pay slightly more than comparable positions in neighboring libraries, and because the system is widely known to be well managed and a good place to work. As long as these conditions hold, there should be no problems recruiting new staff to replace departures due to retirement.

Develop leadership training opportunities throughout the organization using current staff as trained mentors. For maximum effectiveness, clear expectations of the mentoring process and product should be given, along with support for new skills which may be required. Cross training, job shadowing, and in house job exchanges are also valuable ways to enhance skills and broaden understandings of newer staff while exposing them to a variety of system leaders.

Adopt a program to acquaint staff throughout the library system with current widely used consumer technologies. Include discussions exploring how these technologies, such as social networking, might drive modifications in the ways the library delivers learning resources. Participation in such a program might be required as a part of orientation for every new employee. Library staff should be at least as technology

savvy as the average teenager, and it would be a great perk for all employees to have “required opportunities” to learn these skills.

Periodically review all position descriptions in relation to planned modifications in service delivery, ensuring that they include the skills required to do the job well, not just the skills of those who currently hold or have recently held the position. Amend the position descriptions as appropriate and ensure that incumbents are offered the training to address any gaps between their current knowledge and new requirements.

Conclusion

This report is offered with great appreciation for the excellent work currently taking place by leaders, managers, and overseers of the Fairfax County Public Library. The system is thriving and successful. Until the recent economic collapse, it was also reasonably funded.

In summary, to ensure that county residents enjoy excellent public library services in 2020, it is recommended that the library system be managerially “chunked” into targeted services, each delivering resources tailored to particular groups of people for specific educational/learning purposes. The more these purposes are understood as components of conditions and circumstances all people in the county have a right to enjoy, the more necessary the services will seem to public funders.

Few library systems in the country have the administrative capacity to re-frame their work as recommended. Fairfax County Public Library is one that could do this. It is led by smart people, committed to knowledge based management of excellent services. Its past and present success is known principally by county residents and library users. It is poised to become an innovative national leader at a time when many are questioning the future of public library services. Fairfax County Public Library can show the way.

Appendix A
Fairfax County Public Library Resources and Services Documentation via the
Office of Planning and Evaluation

Annually

Monthly Reports

- Circulation Report

Reports monthly circulation; door count; and programming stats for each branch and the system and provides the percentage change for the month and year-to-date compared to the previous fiscal year.

- Internet Usage

Reports the monthly number of Internet signups for each branch and the system and provides the totals year-to-date.

- Database Usage

Reports the monthly number of database views for each FCPL and Library of Virginia subscription and provides the totals year-to-date.

- Computer Utilization

Reports the volume of public computer usage as compared to the amount of time the computers were available. This percentage is reported for each branch as well as for the system.

Quarterly Reports

- Circulation Report

Reports the quarterly circulation and door count stats for each branch and the system as well as the number of hours of service. Includes the circ to door count ratio for that three month period for all branches and the system.

Other

- Quick Survey

This annual survey is a short (4-5 questions) paper survey offered in a 'suggestion box' manner. Questions are determined by staff and reflect current issues in the library and the industry and also include a question on customer satisfaction. Staff steer customers toward the survey which is placed in high traffic areas of the library. Each survey offers interested respondents the chance to become a 'customer advisor' by providing their email address. A summary of the survey results is provided to staff and posted on the Library's InfoWeb site.

- Customer Advisor Inquiries

Customer advisors are queried by email (only) up to three times per year on various issues in the library. Previous inquiries asked advisors their views on email notification, 360 Search (database searching) and self-checkout. A summary of the results for each inquiry is provided to staff.

- FCPL Web Site Survey

This annual survey of FCPL's web site users asks 10-20 questions including a question on customer satisfaction. This survey is designed to evaluate the usefulness of the information found on the web site, how easy the site is to use, etc. A summary of the survey results is provided to staff and posted on the Library's InfoWeb site.

- Summer Reading Program

OPE provides analysis of the more than 48,000 participants of the Library's Summer Reading Program (SRP). Branch participants are analyzed by age, grade, and school.

- Performance Measurement

OPE takes responsibility for preparing the Library's annual performance measurement goals, objectives, data, and results for the annual budget submission.

- Strategic Planning

OPE has responsibility for preparing and updating the Library's strategic planning initiatives.

- Doug Miller represents the Library on both the County's Performance Measurement Team and Employee Communications Board and is also the Subject Area Specialist for the County's ICMA membership.

FY2007 only

- Information Needs of the Spanish Speaking Community Survey

This paper survey was conducted at the Centreville Regional Library both within the library and in Spanish speaking institutions and organizations within the community. This survey was designed to help the Library determine ways to better reach the Spanish speaking community served by this branch.

- Assisted with the County's efforts to redesign the County web site.

- OPE was a key contributor to the Library's Internal Communications Survey project as part of the County's initiatives relative to strategic planning.

Appendix B

Fairfax County Public Library Services Clustered by User Groups

Services for Families

- Programs for children
- Programs for children and caregivers
- Books to borrow
- DVD's and CD's to borrow
- Homework help
- Guidance from librarians about recommended books, web sites, and other resources
- Books, web sites, multi-media resources dealing with family challenges such as divorce, death, moving, and diverse family groupings.
- A free place to visit!

Services for Students

- A quiet place to do research and homework.
- Age appropriate resources (books, magazines, DVD's, etc.) for assignments
- Classes to learn how to use new electronic resources
- Online homework help
- Free access to online databases and resources
- Free access to computer to prepare reports and assignments
- Librarians to advise about best resources
- Online resources that can be accessed from home or work
- E-mail access to obtain or submit assignments

Services for Entrepreneurs

- Recommended books, magazines, web sites on starting a business
- Company reports
- Reference librarians to help with detailed searches for information
- Free access to computers for creating business plans, marketing materials, etc.
- Databases with information about potential competitors
- Examples of marketing strategies and materials
- Demographic and lifestyle information about potential customers
- Programs
- DVD's on how to give effective presentations

Services for New Americans

- English language classes
- Books and magazines in many languages
- Bi-lingual story hours
- Free access to computers for email and news
- Resources for homework
- A guide to county agencies offering services to immigrants

Appendix C

Why People Use the Fairfax County Public Library

In 2006 FCPL surveyed the users of the library's various branches. While there were significant variations among the branches, overall the survey indicated:

People came to the library for....

- 61% materials for leisure reading or personal interests
- 17% homework or class related materials and information for me or someone else
- 15% Internet or use of a computer (word processing, MS Office Suite, etc.)
- 8% information or materials for work
- 9% books or other materials for preschool children
- 3% materials that help me learn English
- 21% other reasons

The survey also gathered information about why users chose to visit a particular library (usually because it was close to home), how often they visit this library (almost half come three or more times a month, another third once or twice a month), and whether they live in the service area (94% do).

Information on activities in the library as well as whether users' success in finding needed materials or information was collected. Of the users who indicated they have Internet access, about 2/3 reported they used the library's website in addition to branch services.

Finally the survey documented the demographic characteristics of users including age, sex, race, level of schooling, employment status, language spoken at home, language read most comfortably and overall satisfaction with the visit. The good news for the library systems is that 89% of the survey respondents reported they were "very satisfied" and the remaining 11% said they were "somewhat satisfied." Fewer than 1% reported they were "not at all satisfied."