

Strategic Plan 2012 - 2015: Results of Public Consultation

Date:	October 3, 2012
To:	Strategic Planning Steering Committee
From:	City Librarian

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to present the results of consultations to date on the vision, four draft priority areas and thirteen goals for Toronto Public Library's Strategic Plan 2012 - 2015. At its June 25, 2012 meeting, the Library Board approved the draft vision, priority and goals as a framework for public consultation.

Using the consultation plan approved by the Board in January 2012 consultation was conducted with stakeholders, residents, community groups and library staff. To date, 1,800+ residents, stakeholders and library staff have participated in the process.

Overall, the results of consultation confirmed the direction of the vision, draft priority areas and goals with some changes. The draft vision elicited a strong reaction with a positive response to commitment to service excellence and making Torontonians resilient and successful. The Library's core strength of providing equity of access was thought to be missing. There was a strong preference to change the idea of making people smarter to supporting people in becoming more informed and knowledgeable.

The four priority areas were also endorsed, however, the Library's role in supporting culture was thought to be understated or missing. Key areas where residents would like to see improved service levels include:

- easier online access to collections, including ebooks, eaudio and digitized materials with support for users in library branches;
- increased functionality on the Library's website, including options for mobile users, more options for user engagement, including the ability to post reviews of library materials;
- improved technology in branches, including more computers at smaller locations and wired, flexible public and meeting spaces to support access to information and content creation. Access to different types of technology enabled wired space for individual, group and collaborative work with options for silent study space at targeted locations;

- longer open hours at larger locations to meet the needs of young adults, students and job seekers with access to Library space beyond traditional open hours;
- enhanced programming and service options that address local needs through the use of library space by partners.

Next steps in the consultation process include a survey of residents by an external polling firm, the development of the final version of the strategic plan and continued engagement with targeted stakeholders to develop specific service strategies. Results of the consultation will inform the final version of the strategic plan, which will include service levels and service options. The final version of the plan is targeted for presentation to the Steering Committee and Board approval in November.

Additional public consultation will follow and the Plan and workplan for 2013 will go to the Board again in December.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The City Librarian recommends the Strategic Plan Steering Committee:

1. reviews the results of public consultation to date and directs staff to incorporate the results into the final version of the strategic plan and 2013 work plan.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The cost of the consultation strategy was approved by the Board in January 2012 and is incorporated in the 2012 operating budget.

The Director, Finance and Treasurer has reviewed this financial impact statement and is in agreement with it.

DECISION HISTORY

The Board approved the report *Strategic Planning Steering Committee: Strategic Plan 2012 - 2015: Consultation Plan* at its January 2012 meeting.

<http://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/content/about-the-library/pdfs/board/meetings/2012/jan30/14.pdf>

The Board approved the report *Strategic Planning Steering Committee: Strategic Plan 2012 – 2015: Draft Priority Areas* as a framework for public consultation at its June 2012 meeting

<http://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/content/about-the-library/pdfs/board/meetings/2012/jun25/21b.pdf>

COMMENTS

Results of Public Consultation to Date

Using the consultation strategy approved by the Library, Library staff members have undertaken public consultation with stakeholders including community agencies, city departments, school boards and others, residents and library staff. Emphasis was placed on reaching current Library users and non users. A list of completed and planned events is included in Attachment 1. Key tactics included:

- an online and in branch survey;
- stakeholder roundtables with representatives from city departments, community agencies, school boards and historical associations;
- public focus groups and discussions at community and Library events;
- staff focus groups and presentations and discussions at staff meetings;
- web and social media presence with blogs and twitter chat.

Results of public consultation are detailed in Attachment 2 and summarized below under the vision and draft priority areas.

Vision:

Toronto Public Library will be recognized as the world's leading public library, helping to make Torontonians smarter, successful and resilient through excellent and responsive service.

Summary of consultation:

The draft vision generated a lively and animated discussion with strong agreement with the commitment to excellent and responsive service. The Library's core strength, equity of access, needs to be included along with the idea that there are new possibilities to extend the concept in the digital age. People responded well to the ideas of making individuals and communities successful and resilient but thought that the role of the library in building communities and neighbourhoods needed to be recognized. The word 'smarter' did not resonate with many; people preferred the ideas that the library makes Torontonians more informed, knowledgeable and able to understand and connect with the world around them.

Other ideas:

- highlighting the joy of reading and learning as integral to an enriched quality of life – older adults expressed the idea that the Library makes the City liveable and age friendly;
- the concept of "best in the world" needs to be defined, measured and linked to the idea of continuous improvement of library service in the Toronto context;
- concrete measures of achievement of the vision would document the Library's role in the City and promote accountability.

Strategies to address feedback:

- rewriting the vision to address the missing elements including equity of access, and the library's role in building communities and neighbourhoods and replacing the idea of making residents smarter with the idea of making residents more knowledgeable and informed;

- defining and measuring the outcomes described in the vision both in the Toronto context with some external benchmarking;
- developing outcome measures to track achievement of the vision and highlight the value of library service to Toronto.

Draft Priority Areas:

Grow a City of Readers

Foster literacy and a love of reading as a first priority; helping residents overcome the barrier of low literacy levels

Summary of consultation:

There was strong agreement that promoting the joy of reading is a core priority for the Library. Maintaining the quality, range and depth of library collections in a range of formats was perceived as being fundamental and the most important library service. Programs that support a love of reading and literature were also of high importance, particularly programs for children and youth.

Residents endorsed the goal of improved access to ebooks through an improved interface, a broader range of titles with support for users. Ebooks were thought of as a way of engaging reluctant youth in reading and seniors in the digital age.

Other ideas:

- improving access to collections through the website for mobile users;
- providing more online opportunities for user engagement with the opportunity to post review and comments; youth, for example, may be motivated to read by peer reviews;
- leveraging partnerships with the school boards as an effective and efficient method of promoting reading;
- building on the Library's success in offering high-quality literary programs with increased promotion through email and social media;
- understanding the impact of fines on children's materials as a barrier to usage.

Strategies to address feedback:

- strengthen the theme by adding a message about supporting readers of all ages in improving print literacy skills and in discovering great stories and books;
- maintaining access to traditional formats in response to user demand and usage while actively building ebook collections;
- improving interactive features of the Library's website with access for mobile users;
- monitoring the impact of fines on access for children;
- expanding access and engagement in literacy programs through email promotion, streaming programs and social media.

Develop a City of Learners

Support lifelong learning as fundamental to economic prosperity, social cohesion, and civic engagement

Summary of consultation:

There was strong agreement that offering access to community-based learning opportunities met a wide variety of community and residents' needs. Access to research materials for school, work and independent study, staff expertise, informational programs and study space across the City were described as the Library's key contributions to lifelong learning.

Access to learning programs in Library branches removes barriers, provides a bridge and support to more structured learning programs and formal enrollment. Structured after-school time programs are an opportunity to build life and literacy skills with access to mentors, technology and resources not available at home. For youth, learning opportunities that teach specific skills or which provide experiences through volunteer opportunities help support youth in making educational or career choices through achievable steps. Programs offered in series, in partnership with cultural institutions, colleges or universities engage adults in communities of interest and contribute to a stronger quality of life. The Library as a safe space to read, study and learn was emphasized by many.

Other ideas included:

- linking special collections to the school curriculum to provide enriched learning opportunities in partnership with the school boards;
- using streaming and social media to extend access to programs;
- digitizing archival and special collections was considered to be an effective way to expand awareness and usage of the collections.

Strategies to address feedback:

- understanding the patterns of use in library branches by hour of the day and demographic group will inform future service delivery, including the range of open hours and programs;
- increasing access to technology in meeting rooms and reconfiguring space to address different types of use, including the need for study space;
- expanding partnerships with cultural and educational institutions to provide learning opportunities for residents with linkages with the Library collections;
- developing, sharing and tracking outcome measures to partners to ensure programs achieve shared outcomes;
- expanding access to reference and research materials across the City through digitization and other strategies.

Catalyze a City of Innovators, Entrepreneurs and Creators of All Ages to spark experimentation positioning Torontonians to succeed in a global knowledge economy

Summary of consultation:

The strongest recurring theme was that the Library's role in promoting accessible culture was missing from this theme and that culture and cultural-related industries are critical to support a global knowledge economy and to enhance quality of life for Torontonians.

A second idea that was discussed is that the digital divide is still with us; for many the library is their only access to technology; others look to the library as a place to enhance their technology skills in a supportive environment. Access to computers, software and technology to support access to information and content-creation was perceived to be a critical issue. In small branches it was thought that there are not enough computers and that computer software is not regularly updated.

As the traditional workplace and work hours erode and change, libraries have an important role to fill in providing workspace. Young adults want access to wired, technology-enabled space in non-traditional open hours to engage with others and workers want flexible workspace.

Other ideas included:

- offering space for young entrepreneurs and creators to engage and share ideas;
- engaging with the digital media sector – industries and educational programs to expand opportunities for youth.

Strategies to address feedback:

- introduce clarifying language in the priority area statement to include concepts of creativity and culture;
- reviewing the allocation and use of computers, wireless and other technology in Library branches to promote access to information and to support content creation;
- understanding the patterns of use in library branches by hour of the day and demographic group will inform future service delivery, including the range of open hours and programs increasing
- access to technology in meeting rooms and reconfiguring space to address different types of use, including the need for silent study;
- expanding partnerships to include institutions aligned with innovation, creativity and entrepreneurial activities;
- developing, sharing and tracking outcome measures with partners to ensure programs achieve shared outcomes.

Deliver Excellent Library Service to Torontonians Efficiently and Effectively

Summary of consultation:

A clear message from consultation was that residents' value existing services and maintaining service quality is important. Partnerships with the Foundation and community groups were recognized as important strategies to improve service when they align and support the Library's service values, mandate and strategic directions.

Staff recognize the importance of customer service, technology and community connections as ways to extend access to library service, but want more training in these areas. A continued focus on efficiency and effectiveness will allow the Library to maintain or improve service levels with the use of technology.

Strategies to address feedback:

- develop service standards and evaluative measures to support accountability;
- continue the focus on service efficiency;
- align partnerships to address shared outcomes;
- refocus the staff training program to support users in accessing technology.

Next steps in the consultation process include: a survey of residents by an external polling firm; reviewing and incorporating the results of the City's consultation on the seniors strategy as appropriate; and developing the final version of the strategic plan. Continued engagement with targeted stakeholders, including the Toronto Public Library Foundation Board and education partners will support the development of specific service strategies. Results of the consultation will inform the final version of the strategic plan, which will include service levels and service options. The final version of the plan is targeted for review by the Steering Committee and approval by the Board in November. After consultation the final plan and 2013 work plan will come to the Board in December.

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SIGNATURE

Jane Pyper
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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Consultation Summary