PUBLIC LIBRARIES
TODAY AND TOMORROW

provocative perspectives to spur strategic conversation

MONITOR INSTITUTE
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How to Organize and Integrate Strategic Choices: the Choice Cascade

**What is our vision and theory of change?**
- What do we believe is the nature of the systemic problem(s)? What are the visible symptoms, the underlying causes, and the barriers to change?
- What is our “one day…” vision for change?
- What do we believe are the levers available for creating change in the short term? In the long term?
- What levers will we focus on, and how do we want to balance levers that create direct impact vs. systemic impact?
- What values do we want to embody in our culture & practices?

**Where will we play?**
- What group(s) of people do we want to impact? How will we stand out to them?
- What partnerships will we need to have with other organizations?
- What services will we provide?
- What program design will deliver them?
- What unique role will we play in our sector(s)?
- Where will we focus geographically?

**How will we succeed?**
- What key activities are required, and how do we sequence them to meet our short and long-term goals?
- How will we measure & show the value we provide? Who needs to be convinced?
- Who are our stakeholders, how will they be involved, and what will be our value proposition to each?
- What is a sustainable economic model for the short and long term?
- How will we learn and adapt in real time, and what is the role of data?

**What capabilities will we need?**
- What specific capabilities are required?
- What infrastructure do we need?
- What kind of people, systems and assets do we need?
- How will we develop our talent?
- How will we manage our costs?
- How will we build the right culture?
- What specific metrics will we track?
- What specific incentives will we use?
- What organizational structure will be the most effective?
How to Hold a Great Strategic Conversation

These two frameworks are taken from “Collaboration Above the Fray: Designing Strategic Conversations that Matter” by Chris Ertel and Lisa Kay Solomon, in The Design Management Institute (2012). For their comprehensive handbook on strategic conversation, see Moments of Impact (2013).
# The Current Role of Public Libraries

“If you perceive a library as a shelf of books, it may seem antiquated or outdated...But that is to miss the point fundamentally.”

## Functions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literacy/Education</th>
<th>Information</th>
<th>Community</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The “quintessential educational institution” for the community</td>
<td>Repositories of information</td>
<td>“People may go to libraries looking for books but they find each other there”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Access to education for all citizens</td>
<td>Protectors of public access to free and unbiased information</td>
<td>“It’s a community space. It’s a place of safety, a haven from the world”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment and social mobility through educational attainment</td>
<td>High value on neutrality, credibility, and accessibility</td>
<td>“An intricate part of the fabric that pulls a community together”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Key component of the city’s human capital system”</td>
<td>Resistant to censorship and other restrictions on information access</td>
<td>“Places where people go to explore, interact, and imagine”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural programming: lectures, art exhibits, music, debates, etc.</td>
<td>Provide guidance in finding/navigating information resources</td>
<td>“A unique symbol of the extent of a community’s commitment to the informational, educational, and cultural values it represents”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Help us understand our place in the world, and heritage of communities in we live”</td>
<td>“Librarians can help...people navigate the world”</td>
<td>Public funding “planted the idea that library services were a natural function of government to be provided at public expense”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Encourage us to explore our culture and creativity, and that of others around us”</td>
<td>Foster democracy and civil discourse through unrestricted access to information and diverse points of view</td>
<td>Embracing the idea that “every place ought to have a library”</td>
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Changes and Challenges in the Public Library Landscape

Key Issue Areas

Redefining Literacy
How will library services and programs evolve to meet the needs of new digital learners?
- Processing images and multimedia information in addition to simple text
- “Discovery-based” learning and the ability to navigate different streams of information
- Increasingly important role in educating communities given budget cuts in schools, cost of higher education, need for new professional skills

Information Access
How do libraries defend their status as information providers in an increasingly information-rich world?
- New channels of distributing information
- Redefining the role of librarians
- Responding to challenges related to information security and privacy

Changing Communities
How will libraries adapt to meeting the evolving needs of increasingly diverse patron communities?
- Need for more diverse library staff to reflect changing communities
- Increased role for libraries as providers of public / welfare services
- New generations demanding new services

Advancements in Technology
How can libraries best utilize new technologies to serve core beneficiaries and achieve mission?
- Balance between traditional services and core mission, and patron demands for new technology
- Ability to attract new client groups through technology offerings / services
- Decisions regarding which technologies to invest in, given limited budgets and rapidly evolving technology landscape

Economic Landscape
How will public libraries remain viable as they face budget cuts and increasing competition?
- Need for new sources of funding in the face of cuts in government spending at local, state, and national levels
- Demand for libraries to quantify their value and demonstrate ROI
- Changes in the economics of the publishing industry affecting the delivery of library services
New Directions in the Role of Public Libraries

Even as libraries adapt to a changing landscape, they aim to achieve the same primary goals: “provide engaging learning experiences, become community anchors, and provide access to content even as the devices for accessing that content change rapidly”.

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<td><strong>Literacy/Education</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Increased emphasis on digital/technology skills offerings</td>
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| - Responding to patron demands with non-traditional offerings  
  - New lending programs: cooking utensils, musical instruments, gardening tools  
  - Creative programming: improv classes, blacksmithing demos |
| - Emerging emphasis on content creation  
  - Spaces for collaborative creative activity |
| - Meeting spaces for massive open online courses (MOOCs) and other digital education offerings |
| **Information** |
| - “Using the tools of the digital revolution—the very ones that were supposed to make librarians obsolete—to do a better job for the public” |
| - Provide “pathways” to high-quality information |
| - Redefining the role of librarians “to reflect expertise as content curators and trusted navigators in an ever-expanding ocean of information” |
| - Primary point of access to internet services in many rural/underserved communities |
| **Community** |
| - “Libraries of the future will be less about stuff we are providing than about how we are connecting with our communities.” |
| - Making “a virtue of [the library’s] anti-virtuality” by staging physical events “that matter in ways that digital experiences cannot.” |
| - “The first [reason people still need libraries] is the notion of place, a thing the Internet was supposed to have obliterated. Yet a funny thing happened on the way to the digital future: place kept mattering. It turns out that people often need somewhere to go” |
| - Rethinking physical library design to foster community interaction |
Calling the Question: Is This The End of the Library as We Know It?

“It’s hard not to imagine a future where the majority of libraries cease to exist — at least as we currently know them.”

- “If libraries evolve, are they still really libraries?”

- We’re coming up with all these other ways to try to keep these buildings open. Co-working spaces! Media labs. Art galleries?...It’s impossible to see a world where we keep libraries open simply to pretend they still serve a purpose for which they no longer serve.”

- “The overwhelming majority of the library’s users populate the bright open spaces encircling six floors of stacks—laptop stations, lounges, coffee bar, lunch café. They could have the same experience in the food court of the new Indianapolis Airport... Down the coast it was more of the same, with people treating libraries like nice coffee shops and scarcely anyone touching the books.”

- "I'm not attacking libraries, I'm attacking the concept behind libraries, which is no longer relevant...Because it's been 150 years, we've got this idea that we've got an entitlement to read books for free, at the expense of authors, publishers and council tax payers. This is not the Victorian age, when we wanted to allow the impoverished access to literature. We pay for compulsory schooling to do that.”

- “In short -- much like the post office-- we seem to be losing these iconic communal institutions of our youth. And when we do keep them around, we repackage them along commercial lines as if that's the only way to make them palatable to the public.”

- “The brand of libraries is the book temple. Come to the book temple and get yourself some books. Avid library users know that there’s more to it, but...our values and our operation parameters and even our physical facilities are all built around the codex. If [the ebook] is the future of text distribution, then we’re really screwed, because we are unlikely to ever have the access to these markets and the flexibility with our purchases that we currently have with the codex market.”
The Digital Threat to Library Economics

“Not only are [libraries] being rendered obsolete in a digital world, the economics make even less sense. One can easily envision libraries making their way to the forefront of any budget cut discussions.”  

- "Why are all the authors coming out in support of libraries when libraries are cutting their throats and slashing their purses?...We can't give everything away under the public purse...But because libraries have been around for so long, people have this idea that books should be freely available to all. I'm afraid those days are past. Libraries cost a vast amount ... and the council tax payers are paying a lot of money to subsidise (sic) them, when they are used by an ever-diminishing amount of people."  

- “Print-on-demand services are spreading fast, and electronic reading devices will continue to improve until they rival the resolution and usability of regular books. At that point, the only burning reason for a physical trip to the library will be to see a copy of a needed book that has not yet been digitized, or that has been digi-tized but is not downloadable due to copyright restrictions.”

- “The internet has replaced the importance of libraries as a repository for knowledge. And digital distribution has replaced the role of a library as a central hub for obtaining the containers of such knowledge: books. And digital bits have replaced the need to cut down trees to make paper and waste ink to create those books. This is evolution, not devolution.”

- “In an internetworked world, when you can download anything from anywhere, the idea of having a local copy only makes sense to a hoarder.”

- “There may not always be new material made available in formats that libraries can purchase. This has already started – we had our first request this past week for an item that is not available in print, it’s only available on Kindle. There’s no way that we can buy it.”
Looking Ahead: What Could Libraries Become?

“If libraries remain focused on channeling their resources toward helping people solve their problems and meet their needs, then we are providing a service so unique in this world that it will be hard to readily dismiss us.”74

- **Space**
  - For those who cannot afford to sit at a coffee shop and buy a "four-dollar latte" to use their computer on somebody else's Wi-Fi...the library provides ‘the whole shebang': a quiet location to work in private, a staff member willing to answer in-depth questions...and a meeting place for the community75
  - “They provide a place to go—the crucial ‘third place,’ other than home and work or school (and as early library advocates liked to point out, other than the saloon as well). Unlike Starbucks, you don’t have to buy anything, and the wares are as intoxicating in their way as any at a neighborhood bar—except they don’t impair driving.”76

- **Access**
  - “Librarians themselves don’t talk much about ‘books’ anymore. ‘The library today is more of a platform launching you in all different directions.’”77
  - If there's anything we do well, it's deliver information, and information is knowledge. I think if anybody is positioned to help build workers for this new information age, it is the library.”78
  - “Libraries should find instruction in the evolution of the Internet—which started as a place to post static pages and now is a thoroughly collaborative environment.”79

- **Service**
  - “We are not a format, we are a service.”80
  - “Technology isn’t something we offer, it’s something we do, and helping people understand how to use their technology is perfectly in line with what libraries do best: respond to people’s needs.”81

- **Evolution**
  - “Everything in libraries that we talk about as new today has its roots at some other time...I know writers who wrote their books at the library. I know people who started their business at the library. And what we realized was, if we were going to serve today's people building economic value in their communities and being creative, we had to think about the world differently.”82
  - “Seed libraries and skeletons [and other unique offerings] aren't necessarily a sign that libraries are trying to stay relevant — it's in the very nature of libraries to change. Many of the items we now take for granted — paperback books, pulp fiction and children's books, for instance — were novelties, or worse, when libraries first introduced them.”83
BRIGHT SPOT
Re-imagining the Library for the Internet Age at NYPL

“[New York Public Library Labs] is doing a kick-ass job of just how much of a force for awesome experimentation a library can be today.”

- Experimental design and technology team working to re-imagine the library for the digital age
- Collaboration between lab developers, curators, and librarians to create innovative tools, apps, and experiences related to library services
- Applying traditional roles of libraries and librarians (information providers and information curators, respectively) in modern ways
  - Library as a “data clearinghouse”: more than just a “‘book warehouse’ or even ‘digital book virtual warehouse’”, but rather a portal to information
  - Librarians “curating interesting pathways through the data—the library as a big set of APIs [application programming interfaces]—for educators, artists, etc.”
- Emphasis on engaging library patrons directly to source, organize, and interpret library data
  - “Our strategy starts and ends with users”
  - Ability for patrons to participate in value creation “means much greater public buy-in than the library sees for projects in which the public is only a passive observer. Labs initiatives see ‘a lot more use, and sustained use, than static exhibits [NYPL has] put up in the past’”
- Sample lab projects:
  - Menus Project: Enlisting public help to digitize and transcribe restaurant menus from the past century
  - Map Warper: Enlisting “citizen cartography corps” to build a virtual atlas of NYC by aligning historical maps to digital maps
  - Stereogranimator: Transforming historical 40,000 historical stereographs into shareable animated GIFs
“Most libraries I’ve worked in have realized that to be a bridge where people learn what the library has to offer, it helps to have books, DVDs and music in the native language.”

- Queens, NY: Diverse population with more than 55% of its residents speaking a language other than English at home
- Since 1977, the Queens Public Library system has demonstrated a commitment to assisting in the integration of immigrants to the U.S. through the “New Americans Program”
  - Offerings to help immigrants access on employment, government services, citizenship, parenting classes, etc.
  - Cultural and arts programs celebrating the diverse backgrounds and heritage of library patrons
- First library to use a demographer to conduct detailed analyses of its patron population to inform international collection development and design offerings for patrons
  - Adapts collections and community programming to reflect changing demographics
  - Cultural and arts programs celebrating
- Books, DVDs, and CDs in 59 languages; 12% of materials in circulation in a language other than English
- Focused community outreach to familiarize immigrants with library services
- Community partnerships to help address community welfare issues
  - Queens Hospital: Health literacy, and improved access to cancer screening and care
  - US Citizenship and Immigration Services and ALA: Compilation of library best practices to promote immigrant integration
- One of the nation’s busiest library systems:
  - More than 18.6M items circulated in FY 2012
  - 900,000 active borrowers, with in-person attendance of nearly 13M in FY 2012
  - Nearly 37,500 free programs offered
  - More than 3,000 students attended structured ESOL courses in FY 2012
BRIGHT SPOT
Connecting Users with Technology in Washington, D.C.

“When you say the words ‘libraries’ and ‘future’ together, the first question a lot of people have is: Will there still be books?”

- Dedicated technology space in the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Library in Washington, D.C.
- Reflecting the evolving role of libraries in the digital age
  - “Libraries are facing an identity crisis: As the Internet has become the primary way people gather information, the traditional ‘building filled with books’ model is less relevant to their lives. As a result, ‘libraries are really transforming themselves into technology hubs’”
  - Increasingly common perception of the library “as a community space that enables access to technology and a source of digital literacy for all different demographics”
  - Providing access to the internet and other digital technologies that patrons may not otherwise be able to afford
- Focus on skill development and digital literacy
  - As a physical space reflecting the library’s investments in digital resources, the Digital Commons “is not only bridging the digital divide in terms of what people say when they mean about access to the internet…it’s access to tech and the skills they’re going to need as tech continues to change the way that we interact, the way that we work, and the way that we learn.”
- Sample offerings (DC Library)
  - PCs and “creative stations” with Adobe Creative Suite Software
  - 3-D printer
  - Digital bar to sample tablet computers
  - Dream Lab co-working space
  - Espresso book machine
“Now more than ever, libraries and librarians need...tools to help them identify and address their users’ rapidly-evolving needs, through flexible, nimble, and responsive decision-making and program design.”

- Recipient of a grant to fund the commission of a partnership with design firm IDEO to facilitate “re-thinking of [libraries’] traditional mix of services and program, identifying fundamental questions about their roles in an evolving world”

- Responding to patron needs with the Innovation Lab, a flexible space that allows the Chicago Public Library to experiment with new ideas and services “in order to be more customer focused and able to adapt to the community's changing needs”

- Currently filled by the Maker Lab, a collaborative space in which people come together to share knowledge and resources to design, create and build items
  - Move away from traditional role of the library as a space providing access to its collections of information and media, and toward collaborative creation spaces
  - Access to tools (e.g. 3-D printers, vinyl cutters, software, laser cutters, etc.) and knowledge (from co-users and library courses)

- Adaptability in offerings, with plan to evaluate the project after its scheduled 6-month stint to determine the fit with the Library’s mission and the ability to bring the project, or elements of it, to a wider audience in the neighborhood branches
BRIGHT SPOT
A Community-Led Library at the Village Learning Place

“It’s amazing that the community had this vision of a resource that would be available and open as a neighborhood nexus...That’s what libraries are talking about now and this was back in 1997.”

- Founded in 1997 when the Charles Village branch of the Baltimore Public Library was forced to close because of budget issues.
- Residents rallied and worked out a deal to lease the former Charles Village Library for $1 a year if they were responsible for staffing and running the library.
  - Has grown from volunteer-driven to supporting 24 paid staff members, but remains focused on contributing to the personal and professional growth of its patrons.
- Driven by a community vision to be not only a circulating library, but also a community center serving the educational, cultural, and social needs of its racially and socio-economically diverse population.
  - Partnerships with local educational and service organizations (e.g. Baltimore Community College, Baltimore Public Schools, Head Start) make a meaningful impact in the local community.
- Strong focus on strengthening the local neighborhood by “serving as an anchoring institution, a symbol of local pride, and a gathering place for a diverse community.”
  - Offerings include a community garden, GED and adult education courses, musical performances, health and wellness workshops, and children’s programming.
Role of Public Libraries


5. Davey.


11. Levien, p. 18


13. Akst.

Changing Public Library Landscape


16. “Public Library Association strategic plan.”


19. “Public Library Association strategic plan.”
Evolving Role of Public Libraries


27. Brian Bannon in Mullaney.


The End of Libraries as We Know Them?


31. Siegler.

32. Siegler.


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47. Micah May in Madrigal.


49. “NYPL Labs.”


52. “Staying in touch.”

53. “Staying in touch.”

54. Berger.

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60. George Williams in Peterson.


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66. Levien, p. 5.


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72. “About Village Learning Place.”

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81. Kenney.

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