



A Plan for Success 2018-2021

Rockford Public Library

Adopted by the Board of Library Trustees on March 25, 2019

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Introduction

In October 2017, the Board of Trustees of the Rockford Public Library, together with Library Administrative and Management staff, and representatives from the RPL Foundation and Friends of the Library met to discuss a new strategic plan. Mike Mastroianni facilitated the effort and helped the Library team develop four Affirmation Statements:

- RPL is a key education provider that enriches and empowers all users through a variety of learning experiences.
- RPL forges collaboration and partnerships with public and private sectors to achieve maximum potential in the area.
- RPL is the destination designed to inspire learning and innovation while promoting community member collaboration and civic engagement through information.
- RPL leverages emerging technologies to create a culture of innovation.

From those statements, five aspirational initiatives were developed.

1. **100% of third graders in Rockford pass the statewide reading test.**
2. **Every child in Rockford is ready for kindergarten.**
3. **Everyone is provided tools to improve their employment, advance their ideas, or explore entrepreneurship.**
4. **Diversity and inclusion in our community is celebrated.**
5. **RPL staff are the gold standard of customer service.**

Four of the initiatives look outward toward the community and the role that RPL could and should fill in a community improvement process. The fifth initiative – RPL staff are the gold standard of customer service – sets the bar high for the Library’s greatest resource, its staff.

In addition, a traditional management strategies and tactics section has been developed. It is recognized that the aspirational strategic initiatives are only possible when the basic foundation of the Library – employees, facilities, technology, collection -- are strong and performing well. These are made possible through equally well performing finance, communications and development initiatives.

COMMUNITY STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

1. 100% OF THIRD GRADERS IN ROCKFORD PASS THE STATEWIDE READING TEST.

Why? A rationale for the Library's community initiative:

From 2017 scores statewide, 36 percent of third-graders met or exceeded state reading standards. That number goes down to 35 percent in the Rockton School District, 24 percent in Harlem, 22 percent in Belvidere and 17 percent in Rockford Public Schools.

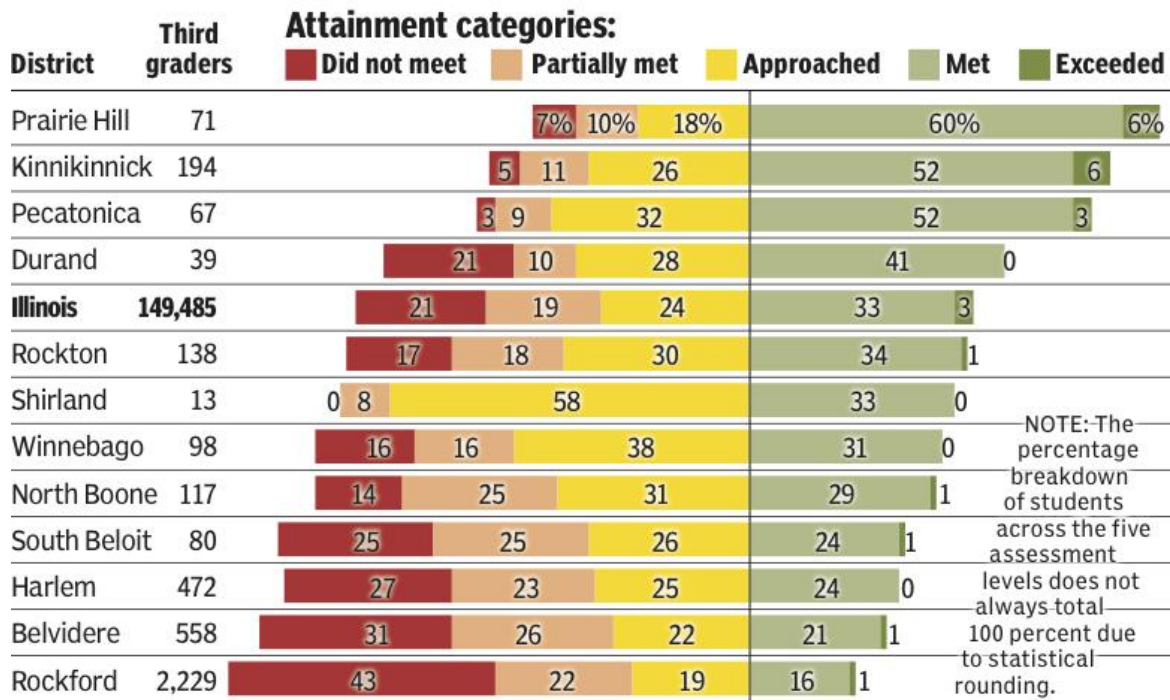
In Rockford, 958 of the district's 2,229 third-graders — 43 percent — are in the very lowest category of achievement, “did not meet.”

A reading challenge

Reading at grade level by third grade is at the center of a newly launched community effort aimed at raising academic achievement in Rockford public schools.

Of the 12 public school districts in Winnebago and Boone counties, only four beat the state average for reading at or above grade level in third grade.

The 2,229 third graders of the Rockford School District, where the community's efforts will concentrate, fared the worst with 1,850 of its third graders coming in below grade level.



Source: Illinois Report Card

GATEHOUSE MEDIA

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What? Strategies and tactics for the Library:

A. Spark interest in reading and learning for children of all ages.

1. Provide fun-filled Reading Challenges in the Summer. Experiment with Reading Challenges throughout the school year.
2. Provide story times for school age children.

B. Help at-risk readers maintain or improve the reading ability they build in school.

1. Cooperate with other agencies to transport children to a public library location and then provide reading games and opportunities for encouraging reading by children.

C. Give parents and caregivers tools and techniques for helping children succeed.

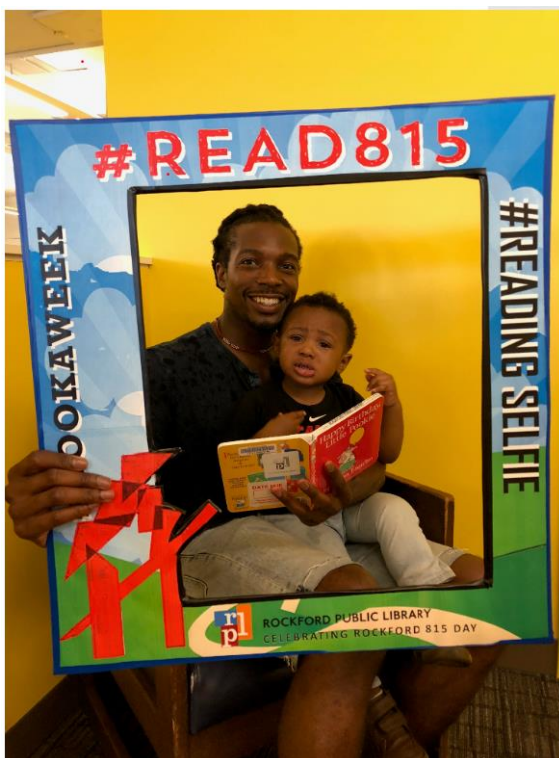
1. Provide reading and learning games at family festivals at Fairgrounds, Dennis, and Summerdale and other appropriate Mobile Expedition locations (Levings Lake) as opportunity arises.
2. Develop parent-child Read Play Learn kits, ala the pre-school RPL kits, and market both. Possibly demonstrate use at Mobile Expedition sites.
3. Promote the Read and Reward child card that provides mechanism for paying off library fines with appropriate library use (checking out books and returning on time, attending youth services events).

2. EVERY CHILD IS READY FOR KINDERGARTEN.

Why? A rationale for the Library's community initiative:

Currently (test scores from Fall 2017), the state's new Kindergarten Individual Development Survey showed that 24 percent of the state's kindergartners — or fewer than one in four — were deemed ready for kindergarten in math, reading, and social-emotional development last fall, with 42 percent not showing any signs of readiness. Eighty-one percent, or 106,670 students, were surveyed.

In Rockford, 25 percent of kindergartners demonstrated readiness in math, reading and social-emotional development while 40 percent did not show any signs of readiness. Fifty-four percent of Rockford's kindergartners met social and emotional benchmarks, compared with the state's 49 percent. In math, 32 percent of Rockford's kindergartners were deemed ready for school, compared with the state's 30 percent.



Dad reads aloud to his son at the Hart Interim Library.

What? Strategies and tactics for the Library:

D. Encourage early literacy skill development by supporting families, childcare providers and educators.

1. Provide educational opportunities and resources (such as, bookmarks that provide suggestions for parent-child engagement) to day care providers, educators, worship centers, MOMS clubs, Strong Neighborhood Houses, family festivals at Fairgrounds, Dennis, Summerdale, others, and to parents (such as flannel board fun). Produce a Mobile Expedition calendar.
2. Model successful story time engagements at pre-schools, home child care locations and through other outreach opportunities. Record and broadcast events on YouTube channel, and through other means.
3. Cooperate with Head Start, the YWCA, and RPS 205 Early Childhood Program to assist and reinforce the positive engagement.
4. Provide bilingual learning opportunities and resources, particularly in Spanish.
5. Develop 'tips' for families, childcare providers, in using the AWE stations.
6. Investigate a New Baby packet of resources to provide at hospitals. If possible, partner with hospitals or others to develop a packet with board book, invitation to story time, etc.
7. Promote the Read-Play-Learn kits availability in Youth Services.

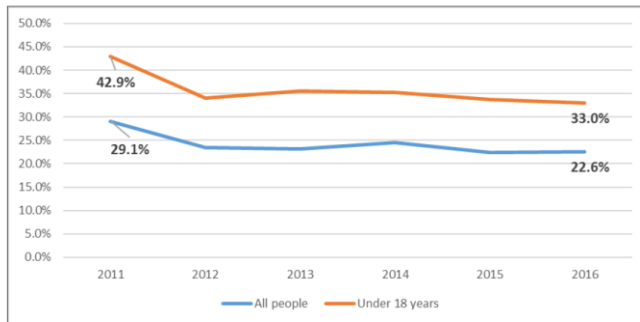
E. Improve school and reading readiness for young children.

1. Provide story times for newborns through kindergarten. Experiment with pop-up locations.
2. Develop a Born Learning Trail at the Montague Branch.
3. Continue to encourage the 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten program. Provide more training to staff.
4. Develop early childhood play and learning friendly environments at each location.
5. Lower age of eligibility for children's library card; provide fine relief for attending story times and other family programs.

3. EVERYONE IS PROVIDED TOOLS TO IMPROVE THEIR EMPLOYMENT, ADVANCE THEIR IDEAS, OR EXPLORE ENTREPRENEURSHIP.

Why? A rationale for the Library's community initiative:

Poverty Rate

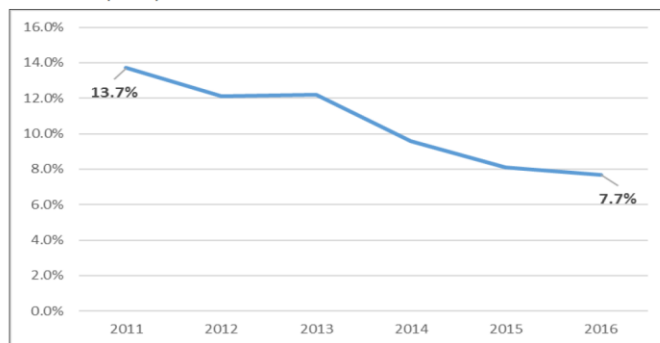


Source: U.S. Census; American Community Survey 1-year estimates

While the percent of people below the poverty rate dropped significantly after the Great Recession, it has remained stubbornly high since. For all residents, the poverty rate in Rockford remains nearly 74% above the state rate and 61% above the U.S. rate. The poverty rate for those under 18 in Rockford is slightly more above the state and U.S. rates.

Source: U.S. Census; American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates

Unemployment Rate



Source: Illinois Department of Employment Security Local Area Unemployment Statistics

While the city's unemployment rate has dropped significantly since the recession, it still remains almost 2 percentage points above the state rate and almost 3 percentage points above the U.S. rate. Additionally, the decreased unemployment rate locally is partly a function of population loss and people leaving the workforce, not just people finding jobs.

Source: Illinois Department of Employment Security Local Area Unemployment Statistics

A

Rock Valley College Committee estimated 45,000 residents do not have a high school diploma or equivalent. The 2016 census data estimates 24,000 City of Rockford residents over 25 years old do not have a diploma or equivalent.

What? Strategies and tactics for the Library:

F. Support Economic Development through partnerships with businesses, federal, state, and local agencies that assist with employment opportunities and small business start-ups.

1. Continue partnership with SBDC for business start-ups. Include classes on executive summary, market research, and financial plan.
2. Provide an employability program with a comprehensive understanding of the skills needed for jobs, an assessment tool of customer's skills, classes for basic skills (using email, counting cash, using a cash register).
3. Provide job fairs in partnership with local businesses and others.
4. Know the resources available throughout the community and refer customers as appropriate.

G. Provide resources (such as equipment, rooms, online tutorials, hands-on training) for adults to improve their job skills.

5. Continue Resume clinics. Add training in writing a cover letter, using online application forms, and interviewing skills.
6. Provide Job Board.
7. Promote Universal Class offerings on entrepreneurship and employable skills.
8. Develop a media creation station with digital artwork, video and audio recording and editing capabilities.

4. DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN OUR COMMUNITY IS CELEBRATED.

Why? A rationale:

According to the 2017 Census data, the City of Rockford is 54% white, 21% African American and 18% Hispanic, although the Hispanic number may be under-reported. Nearly 20% of residents speak a non-English language. Places of worship include Christian, Judaism, Islamic, with other religious groups also in the area. 25% of the population is under 18 years old; 16% is over 65 years. Educational attainment, and household income vary dramatically and impacts the community's sense of cohesion. There is a decided West side -East side division. In addition, those who identify themselves as part of a minority group -- LGBTQ, members of distinct cultural or ethnic heritage, mentally ill, homeless, those that have served jail time -- all feel different and excluded. Yet, diversity brings the community great opportunities for new ideas and knowledge. Different life experiences bring unique ways of viewing challenges and overcoming barriers.

What? Strategies and tactics for the Library:

H. Ensure that all members of our community feel welcomed, valued and respected.

1. Create and embrace inclusive spaces in Library locations through displays, events, passive activities and other.
2. Accommodate groups with diverse ages with parallel events, e.g. one for child & one for parent; or one for senior dementia and one for caregiver.
3. Seek ways to connect with "Just in Time" learning opportunities.

I. Provide learning and celebratory opportunities for the community.

1. Collaborate with multi-culture festival events, including Midtown Ethnic Festival, Rockford Plates at Midway Village.
2. Provide multicultural events during a 'slow-festival season' with food, performances, art. Invite others to partner with Library.
3. Celebrate the different Unions in Rockford. Use the Makerlab to demonstrate skillsets.
4. Partner with others to offer summer meals for lunch and learn sessions on diversity, tolerance, inclusion, equity, empathy, etc.
5. Investigate livestreaming possibilities for events at the Nordlof to be shown on monitors at branches and other locations.

J. Model inclusiveness by learning and providing information about our diverse population.

1. Develop and use an annual Diversity-Inclusion calendar to guide staff on events and dates popular in diverse communities.
2. Represent the cultural history of Rockford. Partner with Ethnic Heritage Museum. Provide travel display for use in other locations. Enlarge images from early maps or photos that feature different cultures and neighborhoods. Bring in re-enactors for more interactive learning.
3. Provide staff training with weekly emails on diversity and inclusion. Provide background for an upcoming celebration. Offer optional educational sessions.
4. Provide more Spanish language materials and promote to the Spanish speaking population.
5. Learn and use language and behaviors throughout the library that demonstrates respect for the diverse population and provide excellent customer service.

5. RPL staff are the gold standard of customer service.

Why? A rationale for the Library's initiative:

Businesses know that providing positive experiences for buyers can dramatically impact their growth. This is also true for the public library, which faces competition from the Internet, ebooks and other e-resources, on-demand television and movie services, as well as demand for our customers' time and willingness to support local tax dollars for library services and facilities. Good customer service:

- Provides value – Great customer service programs should focus on treating customers well, answering questions, and exceeding their expectations. This approach helps businesses engage customers and build strong relationships.
- Retains customers – Keeping loyal customers is way less expensive than getting new ones. Research shows that it costs about six to seven times more to attract new customers than to retain existing business. Satisfied customers become devoted buyers when a business is trustworthy. Research shows there is a 60 to 70 percent likelihood that existing customers will return to make new purchases.
- Creates endorsements – Loyal customers provide positive endorsements and online reviews that can help businesses strengthen their brand. A loyal customer on average is 10 times more valuable than their first purchase. Research shows that people often make purchasing decisions based on recommendations from family and friends, rather than on advertising messages.
97 percent of customers will tell others about very good or excellent customer service experiences.
70 percent would spend more money with a company that has excellent customer service.
24 percent will return to businesses two or more years after a good customer service experience.
59 percent would try a new company to receive better customer service.
- Prevents business failure – About 96 percent of American businesses close their doors within 10 years. One of the contributing problems is poor customer service. Buyers become frustrated over small problems that are not addressed, such as unclear communication, slow follow up on questions, or ignored requests. While the Rockford Public Library is unlikely to close their doors, decreasing support for the Library results in an organization less able to successfully perform its mission and a downward spiral is created.
- Reduces employee turnover – Employees want to work for businesses that appreciate worker contributions, encourage new ideas and treat customers fairly. When people work for an employer that provides excellent customer service, they are more engaged in their work and become an advocate for the business. They are more willing to stick with the company through business challenges and economic changes.

The Library is not immune to the ill-effects of poor customer service to its business. Poor customer service can result in less community support, fewer customers, employee disengagement and increased staff turnover. The emphasis for this initiative will be on training and best practices. In 2017 and early 2018, all staff were required to complete online training courses in two areas: "Understanding the Homeless Population" and "Harassment – Recognizing it and Following Legal Requirements".

What? Strategies and tactics for the Library:

K. Provide training and resources that ensures that all staff have the opportunity to successfully “wow” library customers and to develop customer satisfaction and loyalty.

1. Continue to offer resource and database training to all employees.
2. Continue to offer safety and security training.
3. Continue to provide health and wellness activities, including health fair.
4. Follow up with areas of concern re staff health, knowledge, and attitude.
5. Continue to offer established and emerging best practices in public library services.
6. Build work-related training into annual goal setting and evaluation process.

L. Develop strategies to help staff identify and resolve barriers to service and assist with customer recovery.

1. Review the “no” logs previously developed; determine ways to reduce the number and types of “no’s”; and demonstrate to staff how to change those “no’s” to more positive sounding statements.
2. Require all staff to take the Universal Class series on customer service.

M. Develop staff culture that encourages building customer relationships and advocacy.

1. Consider staff committee to involve employees at All-staff meetings with tips, reminders, role-playing, how-to handle difficult situations.
2. Use customer service champions at each type of service point to look for additional ways to ‘wow’ the customer.

N. Infuse all decisions on policies, procedures, processes and actions with a “How does this impact customer experience?” perspective.

1. Develop customer service gold standard for each type of service point.
2. Consider offering classes in customer service.

O. Expect staff to consider that every interaction impacts “the RPL brand” and positive word-of-mouth.

1. Incorporate customer service more directly into annual review process -- review job expectations, and ‘gold standard’ for employee’s type of service point and assess success.
2. Provide gold standard of customer service practices to all new employees. Review gold standard annually.

MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

Management strategies and tactics are guided by the Library Mission, Affirmation Statements, and five strategic initiatives. This list is not all-inclusive and is a selection of objectives and activities to be completed in support of the mission and Library priorities.

A. FACILITIES: Provide the necessary infrastructure and safe, healthy libraries to meet the needs of an urban population.

1. Complete design and build new Main Library.
2. Complete an Assessment and use its 20-Year Plan as a guide for appropriate facilities maintenance and repairs. Update the assessment as needed.
3. Continue to cooperate and study possible options for a new West Side Library service point to replace the Lewis Lemon Branch location, including co-locating, repair, renovation, and constructing a new building. Assist with final recommendation in order to provide a safe, healthy, cost-effective location for the West Side Library activities.
4. Continue to reduce Energy consumption and develop facilities that meet sustainability principles. Complete an energy-use review of the buildings.
5. Provide safety and security for library users and staff through improved facilities, procedures and training.
6. Provide fire protection for the Data Center at Nordlof.
7. Assess the effectiveness of the Mobile Expedition and plan for its future.
8. Assess need for future library services throughout the City and plan how to provide.
9. Update meeting rooms with the equipment, furniture, white-boards, etc. requested for effective meeting spaces.
10. Create a plan and schedule for updating furniture and shelving in the branches.
11. Use the Facilities Department staff more effectively by implementing an improved job-ticketing system and other efficiencies.
12. Continue to contract for security services and ensure employees are well trained and capable of handling problems. Assess hours of service and costs.
13. Continue to contract for cleaning and delivery services. Assess hours of service for cleaning to maximize its effectiveness. Ensure building cleanliness is maintained at a high standard.

B. TECHNOLOGY: Implement innovative technology using a cost, usability, and security analysis method as a strategy to focus on user experience and increase efficiency, service, and responsiveness to the community.

1. Continue to expand use of RFID at checkout and check-in.
2. Develop a five –year replacement, upgrade, and new technology plan.
3. Continue to develop avenues for library visitor self-service and to provide necessary training and signage.
4. Continue to schedule updates to the Integrated Library System (currently Sirsi-Dynix) and add useful products and services as cost effective. Explore user experience (UX) options in the ILS.
5. Develop a plan to upgrade and standardize the public PC Management system, including reservations, printing, scanning, and faxing from public computers. Implement as possible. Provide other equipment as feasible.
6. Evaluate and stabilize the technology services the Library uses to operate and offers the public. Consider from public viewpoint as well.
7. Ensure that all technology that the Library invests in are used to their fullest capabilities, e.g. Office 365.
8. Continue to develop and use technology that provides useful services to the public and/or allows the library to operate more effectively.
9. Keep current with the latest technology available; plan and forecast for upcoming technology trends; expand technology initiatives as appropriate based on needs for the public.
10. Become acquainted with and begin preparation for a transition to RDA cataloguing.
11. Consider use of consultants whenever appropriate.

C. STAFF: Create a customer-focused environment with sufficient talented, expert library staff.

1. Modify Table of Organization whenever possible, so as to have staffing levels that are appropriate and effective for a 21st Century Library.
2. Develop a recruiting, interviewing, and on-boarding routine designed to attract, select, and orient the best possible employees. Design an exit-interview or other experience to use with employees leaving library employment in order to gain useful information to improve the workplace.
3. Continue to provide managers with training and mentoring on staff supervision, safety and security awareness, customer interaction techniques, as well as technology and basic building layout and emergency equipment knowledge.
4. Provide necessary staff training using a variety of methods (such as webinars, ‘staff development day’, group classes, one-on-one training) on a wide range of topics, including but not limited to: e-services, databases, technology, customer service, child development, event planning techniques, safety and security, reader’s advisory, use of website & online catalog.
5. Track staff use and application of techniques and information provided in training sessions.
6. Continue updating the Library Board Personnel Policies and re-write the Library’s staff handbook. Review with legal counsel.

7. Continue to fine-tune departmental procedures, so as to be useful for all. Include opening, closing, checkout, library card application, answering and referring questions, providing reader assistance (and viewer, listener) procedures, etc.
8. Provide health and wellness activities whenever cost effective.
9. Provide employees with emergency, safety, and security training on a continual basis to ensure effective response.
10. Provide opportunities for staff to attend conferences and other off-site training whenever cost effective.
11. Encourage professional and para-professional staff to be involved in library profession, especially in the region and state.
12. Uphold positive labor-management relationship to create the best possible environment for providing library services.

D. COLLECTION: Provide a dynamic, current collection of resources in popular formats designed to meet the changing needs and expectations of the community.

1. Use information from Collection HQ to improve selection, retention and development of collection, and increase usage at various locations.
2. Explore Analytics on Demand to determine demographic segmentation data to better serve patrons in each location.
3. Analyze the organization and presentation of collections, act upon recommendations to provide improved public access.
4. Explore the online catalog presentation and merchandizing to improve “browse-ability.”
5. Improve performance utilizing statistical measures such as Relative Use and Turnover. Allocate resources to the best performing area of the collection. Continue to collect and respond to Relative Use, Turnover Rates, and other data on library’s collection.
6. Provide training and establish expectations for selectors/de-selectors of various library materials.
7. Use merchandizing and display techniques to highlight library collections.
8. Continue to develop and market comprehensive digital collections and train staff and public on how to use.
9. Continue digitizing parts of the Local History Collection and develop a plan for how to catalog or index so that the digitized pages are accessible to the public.
10. Explore Library of Things and other non-traditional materials as value-added resources that might be loaned to the public.
11. Provide resources for both children and adults that aid in the accomplishments of our strategic plan.

E. COMMUNICATION: Create and promote a public image of the library as a vital, dynamic, customer-friendly, and essential community resource.

1. Develop an on-going marketing calendar to promote services and events.
2. Develop more protocols and increase use of social media.
3. Continue to update and use the new website.
4. Increase the audience for library E-newsletters.
5. Develop uses and involve staff in communication efforts on the large screen monitors.
6. Develop a product for the local media that highlights our Local History information as well as a strategy for delivering the product on a regular basis.
7. Develop a product for regular use in Chamber of Commerce newsletter and/or other similar publications.
8. Continue to develop good media relationships.
9. Address the appropriate use of paper handouts and costs.
10. Use Analytics on Demand to analyze our audience and drive campaigns.
11. Use TV and radio media as return on investment indicates is appropriate and as media appearances are available.
12. Assess distribution of the Explorer for awareness and promotion of classes and events.
13. Re-brand using the “With RPL I can” tag line (library cards, welcome mats, business cards, etc.) Seek user testimonials.
14. Promote partnerships with other agencies and businesses in the community.
15. Develop protocols with library staff who are planning events so as to identify the promotion needs early in the process.
16. Identify and promote actions from the strategic plan initiatives, as appropriate, to the community.
17. Develop multiple processes to acknowledge library staff members’ successes.
18. Explore possibility of external blog to promote library initiatives.

F. FINANCIAL: Strengthen financial position to enable the Library to provide the essential and the cost-effective desirable resources and services.

1. Demonstrate how RPL is a good steward of public funds; build a case for increased tax support for the Library, as needed.
2. Develop a five-year fiscal plan, based on desired activities within the Strategic Plan.
3. Review all costs for possible savings, including but not limited to: the efficiencies of energy use, processes, and staff; as well as establish a return-on-investment standard for class and event costs.
4. Examine annually the Library’s fee schedule, including room rentals.
5. Develop cost-effective plan for Library outlets.
6. Examine possibilities of new revenue opportunities, including pay-for-service options.
7. Explore cost-saving partnership opportunities, whenever possible.
8. Provide a sustainable budget to support current and future technology initiatives and upgrades (for systems) Library wide.

G. DEVELOPMENT: Strengthen philanthropic support of RPL to provide the extras or the value-added elements for the Library.

1. Continue to seek donor assistance and fund-raise for special projects (e.g. naming rights).
2. Develop a fundraising campaign for 150th anniversary.
3. Establish priorities for fundraising expenses.
4. Continue to apply for grants, as opportunity and the potential for meeting a need allow.
5. Continue annual donor campaign.
6. Look for sponsors for events and/or classes.
7. Provide RPL update as a mid-year touch point to donors without a request for funds.
8. Support Friends of the Library in their fund and friend-raising activities.
9. Support RPL Foundation in its fundraising opportunities.
10. Develop partnerships to enable a higher return-on-Investment in library facilities, collection and events.
11. Encourage rental use of the Nordlof by a wide variety of agencies, businesses and organizations.