Lower Merion Library System
Strategic Plan 2017-2019

With the completion of a 10-year project to re-imagine library spaces in Lower Merion in sight, it is time to begin developing library programs and services to fulfill the promise of the enhanced facilities. By developing a strategic plan, LMLS has identified priorities and expectations for libraries in the township. This strategic plan is the result of input from staff, library boards and public officials and represents a blueprint for library service in the coming years.

LMLS Background:

The Lower Merion Library System consists of six libraries serving a community of 57,825 in Lower Merion Township of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania. The libraries were founded between 1899 and 1935 by grass roots organizations many of which were women's clubs. In 1935, five of the libraries formed a Pennsylvania non-profit corporation called the Lower Merion Library Association. A sixth library joined the rest at a later date. Although the Association identified itself as a library with branches, the libraries continued to function in a fairly autonomous way until 1961, when the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania established The Library Code, Act of June 14, 1961, P.L. 324, which institutionalized both standards and funding for public libraries. In response to the Code, Lower Merion libraries reorganized and consolidated the six-member Association.

Over the next 50 years, the Association gradually evolved its organizational structure from a loose confederation to a more centralized entity. In 1996, the Association formally changed its name to acknowledge this new identity, becoming the Lower Merion Library System (LMLS). In 2008, LMLS and the Township of Lower Merion finalized a plan to expand and renovate library facilities. Construction of the projects began in 2010. To date, five of the projects are complete and the sixth is underway.

Planning Process:

The development of this plan was begun with the Township Director of Libraries visiting each location to brainstorm with staff using a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats). This was followed by surveys to gather additional input from staff, board members of individual libraries and from Township officials and the Board of Commissioners. The results of those sessions were compiled and themes were identified. From those themes, staff developed five key strategic initiatives. Five teams of library staff members were formed to provide additional detail to each of the initiatives. Throughout the process, the LMLS board of directors provided guidance and review.

The final draft of the plan was approved by the LMLS board and submitted to the Lower Merion Board of Commissioners for review and feedback. The planning teams will meet on an ongoing basis to evaluate progress of the plan and to recommend updates.

Approved by the LMLS Board of Directors on November 14, 2017

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Strategic Initiative: Streamline internal processes for efficiency

Goal 1 - Develop consistent policies and procedures for all LMLS Libraries

Objective 1 - Review current policies and procedures to identify possible items for streamlining and updating

Objective 2 - Update the LMLS Procedure Manual

Objective 3 - Develop core competencies and staff training schedule

Objective 4 – Develop cooperative purchasing procedures for libraries

Goal 2 – Develop and nurture a team spirit across all locations

Objective 1 - LM Innovation Nation

Objective 2 - Librarian's Night Out/Social Activity

Objective 3 – Encourage Outreach to Community

Strategic Initiative: Make technology on all levels a seamless part of the library

Goal 1 - Develop innovative programs and expand technology in libraries

Objective 1 - Improve technology infrastructure by updating Athena3 file server

Objective 2 - Improve staff communication using technology

Objective 3 - Provide more computer access to the public

Objective 4 – Develop Maker Space for patron technology programs

Objective 5 - Develop a five year scheduled of equipment replacement with costs

Goal 2 - Training/Documentation - provide programs and documentation for staff and patrons

Objective 1 - Create staff technology training program/documentation for core technology competencies, including Polaris

Objective 2 - Research and purchase hardware/software to be used as portable technology teaching lab that can be set-up as a small classroom for patrons or staff.

Objective 3 - Finish evaluating credit card technology and implement solution at libraries.

Objective 4 - Develop a list of technology documentation that includes one-page handouts for patrons on e-library platforms such as Hoopla, OneClick, Overdrive, etc. and specific devices like iPad, Kindle Fire, etc.

Goal 3 - RFID - Improve Self-Check process and use by staff training and patron education

Objective 1 - Implement Self-checks from Bibliotheca

Objective 2 – Begin phase-out of Sentry technology

Objective 3 – Evaluate effectiveness of RFID technology and impact on staffing

Goal 4 - Reap maximum benefit from LMLS membership in MCLINC

Objective 1 - Improve knowledge of MCLINC technical documentation (MCLINC knowledgebase & MCLINC internet) among staff

Objective 2 - MCLINC training for LMLS staff

Objective 3 - Replace Pidgin for emergency communication/announcements on LMLS staff PCs

Goal 5 - Future Tech Projects to evaluate for 2019
- Public Computer desktop virtualization of Public PCs
- More comprehensive policy/plan for staff desktops that includes a local permissions policy, a backup policy, a mapped file server, VNC or Teamviewer and other things to improve infrastructure/support
- Other future projects could include an online LMLS book store for donated item sale and a streamlined way to recycle old computer equipment?

Strategic Initiative: Create a more efficient workforce

Goal 1 - Evaluate what is appropriate staffing level and library hours

    Objective 1 - Examine Full Time Equivalent hours for each library

    Objective 2 - Assess feasibility to conform library hours at smaller branches

    Objective 3 – Develop process for sharing part-time employees

Goal 2 - Provide appropriate training and Mentoring

    Objective 1 Create standards/core competencies for new staff for all aspects of library operations, including Polaris, digital collections, policies

    Objective 2 – Provide training and evaluation for core competencies

    Objective 3 - Develop recognition program

    Objective 4 - Survey staff to gauge interest, and needs for mentoring and develop an appropriate program

Goal 3 - Promote Self-Check

Goal 4 - Develop a Succession Plan

    Objective 1 - Change scope to include broader training issues

    Objective 2 - Identify all MLS staff and non-MLS staff who are interested in advanced skills training

    Objective 3 - Create a training curriculum with Department Heads for management processes such as: materials selection, budgets, writing reports, personnel matters

    Objective 4 - Encourage and support township tuition program

Goal 5 - Evaluate the Role of Volunteers in the System

    Objective 1 - Survey libraries on current use of volunteers

    Objective 2 - Create list of needed volunteer opportunities

    Objective 3 - Develop process for recruitment and training

Strategic Initiative: Make the libraries visible and part of the community

Goal 1 - Develop a "Pop-Up Event" for each library

Objective 1 – Each library holds at least one remote appearance annually

Objective 2 - Invite library board members to help at these events

Objective 3 - Conduct a program which has been successful in libraries at the event

Objective 4 - Develop a programming summit for libraries to share best practices

Goal 2 - Create marketing materials

Objective 1 - Update LMLS brand and create tag line

Objective 2 - Create and/or update promotional materials for use at events

Objective 3 - Develop meaningful statistics to communicate the value of libraries

Goal 3 - Increase presence on local social media

Goal 4 - Use video to increase awareness

Objective 1 - Stream episodes of the "Library Show" and "This Month at the Libraries" on LMLS website

Objective 2 - Work with LMTV to create PSA and other promotional media

Goal 5 - Further outreach to Lower Merion schools

Objective 1 - Create a newsletter tailored to the needs of our community educators

Objective 2 - Encourage back to school visits by library staff and have library card promotion events

Strategic Initiative: Develop a culture of philanthropy

Goal 1 - Hold a joint meeting or meetings of Local Board fundraising representatives

Objective 1 - Examine the current state of fundraising events and activities across the system

Objective 2 - Share fundraising techniques and resources

Objective 3 – Create a framework for sharing the planning and proceeds of system wide fundraising events

Goal 2 - Increase local fundraising capacity

Objective 1 – Identify and implement best practices in the field

Objective 2 – Promote fundraising through technology

Objective 3 - Explore avenues to work with other Strategic Planning Committee teams

Objective 4 - Investigate ways to explain the need for sustained stewardship

Objective 5 - Investigate possible system-wide fundraising events

Goal 3 – Expand capacity for system-wide fundraising capacity

Objective 1 - Consider hiring a Director of Development

Objective 2 - Under Director of Development expand funding streams