SUSTAINABLE
COMMUNITIES

Leadership Brief: Partners Achieving Community Outcomes

ABOUT THIS LEADERSHIP BRIEF

This Leadership Brief explores how libraries can increase their impact by aligning library programs with city/county leader priorities to drive positive individual and community outcomes. It identifies six action strategies for library leaders to move toward greater community impacts.

OVERVIEW: Libraries are at the heart of the communities they serve, and are known for the breadth of programs they provide, their stature as trusted community hubs and their ability and willingness to adapt to a rapidly changing environment. From education and learning, to digital inclusion, to healthy, sustainable communities, libraries already meet a wide range of community needs that support leadership and community priorities.

Delivering on the promise of the public library as an essential community partner depends on aligning library outcomes, programs and services with the vision and priorities set by elected city and county leaders. A close connection to leadership priorities strengthens library impact by:

▸ Providing a blueprint for leveraging library capacities where they are most needed

▸ Supporting informed choices about priority library programs—what to start, what to continue and what to drop—that will produce beneficial community outcomes

▸ Helping library leaders demonstrate and document the library's essential role in the community

> "Libraries are neighborhood jewels with amazing resources. They help develop a child's language, reading, critical thinking and imagination. They bridge the digital divide, improve access to information and make a connection to the outside world." [1]
>
> - Mayor Tom Barrett, Milwaukee

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KEY ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Key issues and opportunities for library leaders to consider as they focus on the importance of connecting library and leadership priorities and moving intentionally to identify outcomes that support community progress include:

▶ **An explicit and sustained connection to leadership vision and priorities for the community enhances library focus, impact and success.** Libraries are known for their willingness to adapt their mission and services to meet emerging needs and fill community gaps. That flexibility leads libraries to cast a wide service net, which contributes to lack of clarity about the library's role in the community. When libraries align their work with identified leadership priorities and what matters most in the community, they are better able to make informed choices about library priorities and the outcomes the library is working to achieve.

▶ **The elected leader-library connection is essential regardless of governance structure.** Whether the library system is part of the city or county government, an independent agency, a special taxing district or a nonprofit organization, building a partnership with the local government and embracing leadership priorities provides a path to community impact and builds leadership support for the public library. Regardless of structure, all libraries exist to address community needs, and all library customers are community residents.

▶ **Positioning the library in the greater conversation about community priorities builds leadership support for the library and opens doors for participation at decision-making tables.** *"If you're not at critical decision-making tables, you need to think about how to get to those tables and how to make the library part of strategic conversations about the challenges your community is facing,"* District of Columbia City Administrator Rashad Young recently told a group of library leaders. With a clear focus on specific leadership priorities, elected leaders will know when and where the library can be an essential contributor. In addition, a working relationship between the library director and top elected leaders increases understanding of the value of the library in the community and ensures leader support for library investments.

▶ **Contributing to community progress and change starts with clearly defined outcomes for library work in support of leadership priorities.** Outcomes are defined as beneficial changes that occur because of the library's programs and services. Defining what changes will occur because of the library's work on a specific priority—for example, all school-aged children will have virtual library cards by the end of the semester—provides a clear framework for designing programs to achieve the stated outcome.

Impacts are the long-term effects of achieving the outcomes.

BUILDING THE ELECTED LEADER-LIBRARY PRIORITY CONNECTION

The following questions provide a framework for a team discussion about aligning library work with leadership priorities.

1. What is the chief elected official's overall vision for the community?

2. What specific priorities have been established to carry out that vision?

3. Of those priorities, which connect most directly to the library's capacity, expertise and current work?

4. In what areas can the library have the greatest community impact?

5. What is the library already doing that contributes directly to leaderships priorities? What programs or services could be reduced in scope or dropped to devote more time and resources to top priorities?

6. What outcomes can the library achieve that will demonstrate progress on leadership priorities?

7. What information can the library director share with the chief elected official right now to show how the library can advance key leadership priorities?

8. What do we do first?

SUPPORTING LEADERSHIP PRIORITIES

The following examples illustrate how five libraries are successfully supporting leadership priorities and defining outcomes for their programs and services.

Education and Learning

San Jose Public Library's City Librarian Jill Bourne is leading a citywide education and digital literacy strategy, established by Mayor Sam Liccardo, to improve education outcomes through better coordination of education programs and stronger partnerships among education providers. The strategy is built around three goals:

▸ Amplify the work of schools

▸ Advance learning opportunities through partnerships

▸ Enhance student outcomes

The library's reputation as an education leader in the community and its experience working with diverse partners contributed to the mayor's decision to designate the library director to lead his top priority.

Race and Social Equity

Saint Paul Public Library embraced the mayor's priority to eliminate racial inequities and improve outcomes for all racial groups. Four citywide outcomes guided the library's program development:

▸ Improved knowledge of racial equity concepts among employees

▸ Increased skills to deal with and communicate about racial equity

▸ Racial equity is integrated into routine operations

▸ Procedures are established to engage youth and community members

To support the mayor's priority, the library has diversified its workforce to match the city population; changed practices, policies and programs to ensure equal access (e.g., offering story times in eight languages and eliminating the requirement that patrons must have a library card to use computers because of the disproportionate impact on people of color); and increased staff and community awareness of bias and racism through staff training and special community programs.

Healthy, Sustainable Communities

St. Louis County Public Library is supporting a broad leadership focus on health and well-being of African Americans in the region, with particular emphasis on combating "toxic stress" among children. Director Kristen Sorth said the library was intentional about "steering its priorities" in the direction of six regional action strategies to help children deal with the impacts of too many stressful events and traumas in their lives. Library outcomes focus on:

▸ Resources for children

▸ Health of the region through partnerships

▸ Racial equity

▸ Leveraging the library's capital improvement program to ensure that library buildings support community needs

As a result of its proactive focus on this leadership priority, St. Louis County Public Library has become a valued leader in collaborative work, with a seat at all decision-making tables and recognition as an essential community partner.

Economic Development and Entrepreneurship

Rochester Public Library has become a vital player in the city's high-tech and small business arena and is seen as an essential partner in carrying out the city's economic development priorities. Using an aggressive outreach campaign and a three-point service delivery strategy, the library built capacity to meet a range of business research and development needs to fill a major gap when the city's big-three employers—Eastman Kodak, Xerox and Bausch & Lomb—closed their long-time research libraries, prompting many laid-off employees to launch high-tech startups. Library staff with expertise in market and venture capital research, small business development and grant funding provide services to local businesses on site, online and in the library. The library has successfully communicated that its services and capacities help businesses both save and make money. With support from the Friends & Foundation of the Rochester Public Library, the library purchased new database products that provided $700,000 worth of valuable information to Rochester businesses in only six months.

Digital Inclusion

Charlotte Mecklenburg Library aligned its digital inclusion strategy with Digital Charlotte, a citywide priority to ensure access and opportunity for all. The library is playing a vital role in providing training in digital literacy both inside library branches and throughout the community to meet the needs of diverse audiences including seniors, English language learners, job seekers and the homeless. In addition, the library and school system worked together to ensure that all school children have access to the library's extensive digital tools, anytime and anywhere, using their student IDs as library cards.

EXAMPLE OF AN OUTCOME-BASED MODEL FOR PROGRAM PLANNING

Concept	Definition	Example
Program/Service	What the library does	Summer Learning
Inputs	Resources the library devotes to a program/service	Staff time, media labs, prizes
Outputs	What the library produces	Number of participants, program attendance, number of books read, projects completed, prizes awarded
Outcomes	Beneficial changes that occur because of the library's program	Participants maintain or gain reading achievement as measured by pre- and post-tests
Impacts	Long-term or indirect positive effects of the outcomes	Children read at grade level, achieve success in school, graduate on time, go to post-secondary education and/or secure gainful employment

*Impacts are what we hope for...
outcomes are what we work for.*

STRATEGIES FOR ALIGNING LEADERSHIP AND LIBRARY OUTCOMES

The following strategies provide a framework for enhancing the library's impact, heightening library focus on outcomes and demonstrating and documenting the library's essential role in the community:

1. Know the elected leader's priorities, and make sure the elected leader views the library as a valuable partner for achieving important community outcomes.

2. Involve library staff in embracing leadership priorities and the library's role as an essential community partner to ensure a systemwide connection.

3. Map how library programs and capacities align with leadership priorities to decide where to focus library investments.

4. Stay in touch with changing leadership and community priorities, drawing on the library's ear-to-the-ground capacity.

5. Start with outcomes by identifying what results the library is working to achieve to support leadership priorities.

6. Collect and share stories of impact and indicators of success that demonstrate how library programs have changed lives and contributed to community progress.

MOVING TOWARD GREATER IMPACTS

Today's public libraries have become powerful education institutions, progressive technology centers and essential resources for building healthy, sustainable communities. Many libraries have created successful partnerships with local elected leaders, school superintendents and business and community leaders to enhance their impact as essential resources for transforming people's lives and building strong communities. With a sharper focus on identifying library outcomes that support leadership priorities, libraries can achieve even greater impacts for both the communities they serve and for municipalities across North America who are dealing with similar challenges.

The Urban Libraries Council (ULC), founded in 1971, is the voice for public libraries and the force that inspires them to evolve. ULC creates the tools, techniques and ideas to make ongoing improvements and upgrades in services and technology. For more information, visit www.urbanlibraries.org.

1   Tom Barrett, "2016 State of the City" (February 8, 2016).