Trends: Looking to the Future of the Public Library

Historically, libraries have been tasked with serving a variety of changing public needs, while continuing to fulfill core missions (reference services, lending of physical materials, research spaces, etc.) While the models for delivering these legacy services are changing, it continues to be true that libraries are expected to simultaneously provide new programs and services that address evolving public needs. As communities continue to diversify, technology moves under our feet, and economic conditions evolve rapidly, libraries will be expected to pivot quickly to support communities in unique ways.

This report summarizes new and emerging trends in libraries and considers how they might impact the Greenburgh Public Library, and was conducted as part of the 2016-19 strategic planning process. When we examine broader trends, we can make calculated decisions and plans about the kinds of services and support that the community may value, and how we can allocate the resources to provide them.

Executive Summary

- The range and array of programs and services is evolving and expanding. Supporting the learning and social interests of all age groups continues to be a priority, with an increased focus on developing new literacies, celebrating cultural diversity, and supporting economic development. Twenty-first century libraries are supporting the knowledge and creative economy in ways that position the library as a community catalyst.
- There is a shift from outreach as an activity to community engagement as an ongoing state of being. Libraries are experimenting with new models which are oriented more externally. Libraries are being more selective and strategic with their collaborations, and moving beyond traditional partners.
- A huge challenge is increasing public awareness of all we have to offer. Libraries are tackling this through market research, refreshed brand identity, targeted marketing to specific segments of the population, diversifying marketing strategies and innovative approaches to community engagement.
- Technology is changing rapidly, digital content is transforming the way we do business, and the demand on libraries to provide access to a wide variety of technology and digital content, and on staff to support the use of both, is increasing.
- Print circulation is slowly but steadily declining, while use of e-collections is increasing. We’re at a point where many library users take advantage of both, and tell us they want more of everything! Libraries are challenged to anticipate preferences and develop responsive collections which meet a wide variety of needs for different ages in different formats.
- Libraries are increasingly being used as community gathering spaces. As digital content displaces some print collections, more and more libraries are re-imagining spaces to offer places for individual and group work as well as piloting innovative library services. Library design is focusing on creating spaces that are inviting and comfortable, flexible, experiential, and “green.”
- The profession is under stress. Many libraries are still feeling the effects of the recession, which has resulted in a loss of staff, outdated technology and facilities, and limited support for professional development. At the same time, many libraries have experienced an increase in use alongside the expansion of library services (as described above.) Investing in professional development and supporting staff to ensure organizational health is critical for producing great library service and promoting job satisfaction and productivity.
Overview: Americans and Public Libraries
The Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan “fact tank,” conducts national public opinion polling, demographic research, media content analysis, and empirical social science research.\(^1\) One of Pew Research Center’s long running projects is the Pew Internet & American Life Project, which has included an ongoing, in-depth, study of American libraries since 2011.\(^2\) Pew has recently conducted two studies that are of particular interest when understanding Americans’ general attitudes and behaviors regarding libraries.

Key Findings from the Pew Research Center:

How Americans Value Public Libraries in Their Communities
http://libraries.pewinternet.org/2013/12/11/libraries-in-communities/

1. While books and media still rank at the top of the list of library services that are very important to Americans, they hold that spot only narrowly (by 3%). The rest of the services on that list (librarian assistance, quiet spaces, computers, etc.) all fall within 10 points of books and media on the “very important” list.

2. Most Americans know where their local library is, but as many as 30% of them know very little about what services their library offers. Only 23% report that they know about all or most of the services that their library offers.

3. 54% of Americans have used a public library in the last year, and 72% live in a household where at least one person in their house has used the public library.

From Distant Admirers to Library Lovers- and beyond: A Typology of Public Library Engagement in America
http://www.pewinternet.org/2014/03/13/library-engagement-typology/

1. “Americans who have extensive economic, social, technological and cultural resources are more likely to use and value libraries as part of those networks. Many of those who are less engaged with public libraries tend to have lower levels of technology use, fewer ties to their neighbors, lower feelings of personal efficacy, and less engagement with other cultural activities.”

2. Key life events (the birth of a child, relocating, job loss, etc.) are linked to increase library use, whereas quieter periods of life are linked to decreased use.

3. Acquiring information is a social process. People often feel they need social networks and experts to help them with information-intensive activities.

4. Technology-rich groups in the typology of library users are some of the most engaged library users. The study indicates that this finding suggests technology is not a substitute for “offline” activities, but rather an enhancement tool.

\(^1\) http://www.pewresearch.org/about/
\(^2\) http://libraries.pewinternet.org/
Programs and Services
In recent years, libraries have responded to changing public needs by increasing the number of unique programs and services that they offer. Creative and dynamic programs are frequently highlighted by Library Journal’s “Programs that Pop” editorial series, and feature a spectrum of programs that range from support for job seekers to many kinds of learning collaboratives. Most public libraries’ event calendars illustrate this diverse landscape of the programming now being offered. See: Greenburgh Public Library; Seattle Public Library; Chicago Public Library; Charleston County Public Library.

In 2015, the Pew Research Center surveyed Americans about their interests in library programs and services as part of an ongoing study of library use in the United States. This new survey, Libraries at the Crossroads, found that Americans are interested in a range of additional programs and services. Those surveyed indicated they would like to see programs that:

- Support local education
- Promote digital literacy for all ages
- Serve specific groups like military personnel, veterans and immigrants
- Promote economic advancement by helping local businesses and job seekers.

Libraries have long offered creative/DIY programs, but many are now creating dedicated Maker labs and other types of creative zones or spaces within the library to bring people together and provide resources to support creative activities. Some examples include the Digital Media Labs at White Plains Library and Skokie Public Library, the Idea Box at Oak Park Public Library, MakerSpace at Westport Public Library, and Creation Station at Broward County Libraries.

Another traditional library strength, programs for preschoolers, is also rapidly expanding and transforming. An increased focus on imaginative play, innovative baby and family programs which engage diverse populations, and enhanced children’s spaces are becoming the new normal. Examples include Storyville at the Baltimore County Library, King County’s ABC Express buses, New York Public Library’s Family Literacy Workshops and the Early Literacy Play Spaces at Hennepin County Library.

Other program and services trends include developing new literacies, creative aging programs, and making a greater effort to align library services with local community and government goals, especially workforce and business development.

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4 Greenburgh Public Library Events Calendar. http://www.greenburghlibrary.org/exhibits/events/
5 Seattle Public Library Events Calendar. https://www.spl.org/calendar-of-events
6 Chicago Public Library Events Calendar. https://chipublib.bibliocommons.com/events/search/index
7 Charleston County Public Library Events Calendar. http://www.ccpl.org/content.asp?catID=11629
8 http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/09/15/libraries-at-the-crossroads/
9 https://skokiellibrary.info/services/computers-technology/digital-media-labs/
10 http://oppl.org/events/idea-box
11 http://westportlibrary.org/services/maker-space
12 http://www.broward.org/library/creationstation/Pages/Default.aspx
13 http://www.bcpl.info/storyville
14 https://www.kcls.org/usingthelibrary/library2gap/
15 http://www.nypl.org/learn/parents/early-literacy
Community Engagement

In order to meet new needs in their communities, libraries are collaborating even more with individuals in the community, local organizations, agencies, and government to develop effective programs and services. In fact, the American Library Association finds community engagement to be so critical to modern libraries’ work, that they have developed the Libraries Transforming Communities\(^\text{17}\) initiative. The goals of LTC are:

“LTC will help libraries become more reflective of and connected to their communities and achieve a domino effect of positive results, including stronger relationships with local civic agencies, non-profits, funders and corporations, and greater community investment in civility, collaboration, education, health and well-being.”

The LTC initiative provides a number of tools and resources for libraries to accomplish this.\(^\text{18}\)

The continued transition to eGovernment is an example of an opportunity for libraries, governments, and agencies to work together to support citizens in an increasingly digital world. The passage of the Affordable Care Act\(^\text{19}\), and the insurance enrollment mandate, accelerated the need for assistance selecting health insurance, as well as the internet connection necessary to enroll. Local and regional health agencies, like the Westchester County Department of Health, coordinated with local libraries to host “Healthcare Navigators,” trained individuals who assist citizens in selecting and enrolling in a health insurance plan.\(^\text{20}\) Decreasing use of print materials with federal and state departments of taxation has also changed the role that libraries play in auxiliary government services, as they now increasingly serve as an access point for obtaining and filing tax information electronically. The transition to eGovernment is one way libraries are demonstrating they can respond to dynamic community needs in the 21st century.

Providing opportunities for the community to participate in directing service may also enable libraries to reach new and crucial audiences.\(^\text{21}\) Professionals in the related museum services sector have also begun to share how collaborating with their communities to provide a variety of experiences has evolved and deepened their community relationships.\(^\text{22}\) The Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History, has numerous examples of these collaborations, like their Pop-Up Museums\(^\text{23}\), collaborative art workshops with the Santa Cruz Public Library\(^\text{24}\), and their community driven Memory Jar project.\(^\text{25}\) All of these interactions are focused on inviting communities to be part of the work of the institution, in order to build and strengthen bridges between the institution and the community. These collaborations will become even more important as community demographics continue to evolve, and libraries determine how to meet the needs of diverse audiences in their service areas.

\(^{17}\) http://www.ala.org/transforminglibraries/libraries-transforming-communities/about-ltc
\(^{18}\) http://www.ala.org/transforminglibraries/libraries-transforming-communities/resources-for-library-professionals
\(^{19}\) http://www.hhs.gov/healthcare/about-the-law/index.html
\(^{20}\) http://giswww.westchestergov.com/healthcare/
\(^{22}\) http://www.plpinfo.org/pipsdc/the-future-of-libraries:
\(^{23}\) http://santacruzmah.org/events/category/pop-up-museum/
\(^{24}\) http://santacruzmah.org/2013/8741/
\(^{25}\) http://museumtwo.blogspot.com/2014/06/adventures-in-evaluating-participatory.html
Marketing and Public Awareness
A challenge that libraries continue to tackle is public awareness of quickly evolving programs and services. This is confirmed by the Pew Research Center’s 2013 study, *How Americans Value Public Libraries in their Communities*, where researchers found that while most Americans know where their public library is located, only 23% say they are aware of all or most of the services that their library offers. In fact, as many as 30% say they are aware of very little of what their library offers. Libraries are looking for ways to leverage technology, media, and relationships to quickly reach more of their constituents, so that community investments in unique and innovative services may be fully realized.

Many libraries are making an effort to refresh their brand through re-designed logos and visual identity programs, expanding beyond traditional representations of the library focused on books. Rangeview Library District underwent a complete organizational rebrand as Anythink Libraries26 and the Edmonton Public Library27 has had several creative campaigns since their initial rebranding in 2010, including their involvement in Edmonton’s City of Learners initiative28. Other examples include the Loveland Library’s new slogan “Where You Can!” and a change of their logo from a young boy reading to a tree with branches winding upwards29, and the Troy Public Library’s tagline “Never Stop Learning,” represented in a new logo which incorporates American Sign Language30.

Developing a compelling brand identity is just the start. Increased brand awareness and engagement is the goal of any rebranding effort. Libraries are incorporating refreshed imagery and slogans into traditional print marketing and updated library signage and spaces, but also expanding their efforts to target specific audiences, including teens, non-English speakers, and the “emerging adults” demographic through creative and interactive approaches. Many libraries are making better use of market research tools to understand market segmentation and consumer behaviors and preferences in their service area.

Onsite and online, this trend is manifesting as an increased focus on user experience. Libraries are adopting the lessons of retail to merchandise collections, cross-sell or cross-promote related “products,” applying different strategies related to comfort, fun, and ease-of-use to encourage users to stay on the website or in the library for longer periods of time, and improving signage and layout to promote user-friendly wayfinding. Many libraries integrate web-based marketing, including redesigning websites to function more effectively as marketing tools, in their overall brand refresh, and align these efforts with strategic planning. The Toledo-Lucas County Public Library recently unveiled a new strategic plan31 alongside a redesigned logo and website32, working together to reinforce a fresh look at library services.

Some libraries have redesigned their websites to be more like Pinterest, a visual discovery tool that functions as a kind of online bulletin board. This requires a huge effort in creating fresh copy and images to change content regularly, but offers another way to continually promote awareness of library services and resources. Some examples include the New York Public Library33 and the Harrison Public Library34.

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26 [https://www.anythinklibraries.org/about](https://www.anythinklibraries.org/about)
27 [http://www.epl.ca/ourbrand/](http://www.epl.ca/ourbrand/)
28 [http://www.epl.ca/cityoflearners/](http://www.epl.ca/cityoflearners/)
31 [http://toledolib.org/strategic-plan](http://toledolib.org/strategic-plan)
33 [http://www.nypl.org/](http://www.nypl.org/)
Technology and Learning

In 2014 the Aspen Institute published *Rising to the Challenge: Re-Envisioning Public Libraries*, which in-part explored the library’s role as an educational institution of the future. The report described the nature of the new economic environment that libraries must help their communities adapt to:

“Expanding access to education, learning opportunities and social connections for all is one of the greatest challenges of our time. It is a challenge made more urgent by the rapid transition from old industrial and service-based economic models to a new economy in which knowledge and creativity are the drivers of productivity and economic growth, and information, technology and learning are central to economic performance and prosperity.”

Access to digital technologies and the internet is essential to a modern education and the ability to take advantage of learning opportunities. Fortunately, progress has been made in connecting more of the public to broadband and mobile technologies, but digital skills and knowledge gaps remain. These gaps fall decisively along economic lines, with those who have less still having lower rates of internet adoption, and less access to computers and connectivity. A report from the Government Accountability Office indicates that the principal barriers to broadband adoption (which has numerous economic implications) are lack of perceived relevance, and a lack of computer skills.

Twenty-first century libraries are leading the way in addressing these skills gaps, and supporting the knowledge and creative economy in ways that position the library as a community catalyst:

Diverse digital literacy initiatives are one way that libraries are supporting communities that are facing technological and economic shifts. Classes like Advanced Internet Searching, Backing Up Data, Cloud Computing, and Tablet Basics -- all offered by the Denver Public Library -- provide opportunities for the public to learn new technology skills that will increase their economic prospects as well as their connectivity to the digital world. At the Arlington Heights Memorial Library, they offer a series of classes geared to small businesses, which include Microsoft Office and PhotoShop, but also social media marketing, web development and graphic design. Small businesses can contact the library to deliver this training to groups of their employees. More and more, libraries are providing one-on-one technology instruction services, like those provided by the Twinsburg Public Library and White Plains Public Library. These personalized services are allowing libraries to tailor instruction to reach specific audiences, including individuals with very minimal computer skills, memory problems, or individuals who do not speak English as their first language.

Makerspaces, programs and labs that are designed for creative people to come together and make “stuff”, are another way that communities are being introduced to new technologies. Many libraries like

34 http://www.harrisonpl.org/
36 https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/03/09/fact-sheet-president-obama-announces-connectall-initiative
39 https://www.denverlibrary.org/clc-classes
40 http://www.ahml.info/blogpost/tech-%C3%A0-la-carte-group-classes-businesses
41 http://www.twinsburglibrary.org/content/computer-coaches
42 http://whiteplainslibrary.org/training/
the Fayetteville Free Library in New York, have built spaces that allow the public to come together to learn and experiment with electronics, digital media, fiber arts, and so much more. In addition to introducing communities to new technologies, these spaces also provide an opportunity for individuals to collaborate on projects that sometimes blossom into small businesses and other ventures.

Libraries are also providing opportunities for the community to engage in new learning modalities, where technology and connectivity frequently play a significant role. Online learning platforms, learning collaboratives, meet-ups, and other non-traditional learning opportunities are increasingly supporting communities that are adapting to new economic environments. Many library systems now provide access to subscription learning platforms, like Lynda.com, Learning Express Library, and Rocket Languages, that are sometimes too costly for individuals. These platforms provide technology, management, test prep, language, and a variety of other courses, that are all self directed, and web-based.

Libraries are also organizing groups, and providing physical space, for learners developing specific skills to meet and help each other. These groups range from job seekers who meet to help each other with resumes, like the White Plains Public Library’s Job Club, to those who are developing skills for personal growth, like the Cyber Seniors at Greenburgh Public Library, or the cooking groups that are popping up at many libraries. Whether it’s digitally or in person, libraries are increasingly supporting more non-traditional, self-directed learning in their communities.

Collections
Print circulation is slowly but steadily declining, while use of eBooks and digital content is increasing. While slightly fewer Americans are reading print books and slightly more are reading electronically, the market for print books is still strong and the market for eBooks is stabilizing. Libraries are now called on to provide content to a “hybrid” consumer, who reads both formats. Librarians have always worked to develop collections that meet the unique needs of diverse communities, and are now challenged to anticipate preferences alongside rapid changes in the content landscape and expectations that we will provide a greater selection in every format. At the same time, libraries are expanding the definition of “collection,” to meet changing public needs in new ways, and working to make it easier for users to access what they want, when they want it.

In recent years libraries’ eBook collections have expanded, as have the number of platforms available to host them, providing a wider variety of content for library patrons. In some cases, terms of use are also expanding. In fact, newer library eBook platforms like Total Boox often allow borrowers to indefinitely

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43. https://fflib.org/make/makerspace-faqs
44. https://www.lynda.com/
45. http://www.learningexpresshub.com/productengine/LELIndex.html#learningexpresslibrary/libraryhome
46. https://www.rocketlanguages.com/
keep many of the items that they check-out. Many eBook platforms’ have improved their user experience too, and new eBook platforms have simplified the borrowing process, making library eReading easier for users than ever before. This improvement in experience, as well as an increase in device ownership, may be increasing access to eContent for many users.

However, barriers to eReading remain for many library users and include: lack of an electronic device to read on, lack of broadband access to obtain content, and the necessary technology skills to access the content. Partnerships between libraries, government and local agencies are spearheading creative initiatives to address these barriers to eReading. The Open eBook App and ConnectEd are working to provide eBook access to in-need children, many libraries are circulating eReading devices preloaded with library eBooks, and libraries are also providing device and eReader platform training as part of digital literacy initiatives.

Print books and audiobooks are not the only formats where library collections are expanding digitally. The availability of digital music downloads has grown enormously in the last few years, providing patrons with access to content from top artists. Digital music is delivered to patrons through platforms like Midwest Tape’s Hoopla App, and the Freegal service, which even allows library users to keep a predetermined number of songs in a given time period. Frequently these platforms also have music videos available for download, as well as the ability to digitally stream music. While many patrons still check-out audio CDs, the popularity of these apps has surged. The availability of streaming video content is also beginning to expand, and platforms like Hoopla, Overdrive, and InstantFlix have catalogs that they can offer to libraries. However, due to content windowing and other factors in the industry climate, the currency and quality of the video content available for libraries to lend is very limited.

Libraries have always been about pooling resources to strengthen the whole community. Couple that with a focus on supporting new literacies and the emergence of the sharing economy, and it’s no surprise that libraries are beginning to circulate much more than books, movies, and music. Non-traditional circulating collections run the gamut. Examples include the Sacramento Public Library of Things, Pima County Public Library’s Seed Library, Berkeley Public Library’s Tool Lending Library, and Spokane Public Library’s Community Cameras. More and more, libraries are combining non-traditional circulating collections with the DIY/Maker programs and services they offer on-site, and

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52 http://www.totalboox.com/how-it-works
53 http://www.pewinternet.org/2014/01/16/e-reading-rises-as-device-ownership-jumps/
54 http://openebooks.net/about.html
55 https://starklibrary.org/home/browse/circulating-e-readers/
56 http://www.marysvilleglobe.com/community/136030808.html#
57 https://www.hoopladigital.com/home;jsessionid=41FC52D8F82D8F55C8EF6D5F7FD94E2
58 http://www.freegalmusic.com/
59 https://www.overdrive.com/
60 https://www.rbdigital.com/wlson/service/indieflix
62 http://www.saclibrary.org/Services/Library-of-Things/
63 http://www.library.pima.gov/seed-library/
64 https://www.berkeleypubliclibrary.org/locations/tool-lending-library
65 http://www.spokanelibrary.org/camera-kits/
creating Maker Kits that users can borrow, such as Meridian Library District’s “Make-It-Take-It” kits, and Bear Lake County Public Library’s “Try Something New” kits.

Another trend is the effort to make collections more accessible and convenient, expanding beyond bookmobiles to allow self-service 24/7 access in higher trafficked areas. Many libraries have introduced 24/7 holds pick up lockers, similar to the Amazon Locker model, as well as Redbox-esque vending machines, such as Hillsboro Library’s Book-O-Mat located at the downtown civic plaza, and Edmonton Public Library’s book vending machine in a Light Rail Transit station.

**Spaces**

Libraries have also been addressing changing demands for physical space. To accommodate new programs and services and respond to varying needs of a diverse group of users, libraries are adding more programming and group meeting space, Makerspaces, space for individuals who work from home, business centers, and more space for the community to just be. At the May 2014 ALA Summit on the Future of Libraries, Joel Garreau, Lincoln Professor of Law, Culture, and Values at Arizona State University emphasized, “the importance of library as “space” and the way communities use that space to come together for human interaction and face-to-face experiences.” Library professionals at the same summit also discussed the integration of technology and space, and how the development of more electronic materials impacts physical and virtual space in the library.

The Pew Research Center’s *Libraries at the Crossroads* study also addressed this evolution of space and found that by and large individuals do not believe that the physical footprint of the library should be smaller. Pew found that since 2012, there has been an increase in the number of people that find it acceptable to move physical materials to make room for other purposes. Pew’s researchers also found that in general library users believe that libraries should have more comfortable spaces for reading, working and relaxing.

Library design is focusing more on creating spaces that are inviting and comfortable, flexible, experiential, and “green.” Libraries are at a moment where design must straddle the past and the future, and we may be in this middle place for some time. For example, many libraries are now building in self-service features for those in a hurry, but also maintain staffed desks to provide assistance to patrons who prefer not to do it themselves. Creating more comfortable and inviting spaces for people

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68 [http://www.sppl.org/about/locations/hold-lockers](http://www.sppl.org/about/locations/hold-lockers)
73 [https://www.darienlibrary.org/services/soho](https://www.darienlibrary.org/services/soho)
who want to stay awhile is a trend happening alongside the self-service explosion, which speaks to the
library’s role as both a transaction point and “a third place” or community gathering space. As digital
content displaces some print collections, more and more libraries are re-imagining spaces, but physical
collections still take up a decent amount of real estate. More and more patrons are using digital devices,
but library space planning will still include hardwired desktop computers and even microfilm readers for
the foreseeable future. A focus on flexible spaces, including open floor plans, modular and mobile
furniture and equipment, and smaller service desks, is helping libraries to find the balance in this
moment of transition. Many libraries are also expanding outside - creating outdoors reading rooms,
library/community gardens, and even a Library Farm.77

Other library space trends include creating new fully-digital or separate maker spaces. Meridian Library
District recently opened UnBound, a technology lab and educational facility with special focus on
supporting entrepreneurs, small business owners and Millennials, in a rented space downtown78. The
Omaha Public Library led the effort to secure a vacant Borders bookstore and turn it into Do Space, a
public technology library and an innovation space for everyone in the community.79 Joint-use facilities,
mainly partnerships between libraries and schools or colleges, are also becoming more common as a
way to share/reduce facilities cost and reach more users, as are storefront locations that offer “grab-
and-go” collections and limited services in higher traffic areas.

77 http://www.nopl.org/library-farm/
78 http://mldunbound.org/about/
79 http://www.dospace.org/