**Santa Cruz Public Libraries Strategic Plan 2017-2020: Premise and Process**

**Community First**

The Santa Cruz Public Libraries (SCPL) are entering a period of transition and change. In June 2016, the voters gave their support to the improvement of each of SCPL’s ten physical branches through either construction or renovation.

It falls to us now to consider the functions of these buildings. What services and programs will be relevant to our communities’ values, needs, and goals? What kinds of buildings should we build? It is an exciting opportunity. We need a plan.

In reviewing current public library research and practice, we have found that the most effective strategic plans begin with the community, and perhaps surprisingly, not in the Library. Creating programs and services and then going out to find audiences for them doesn’t help an organization be relevant. Instead, we should start with the community and find out its priorities, passions, and values and then figure out where the Library can fit in.

In her 2016 book, The Art of Relevance, Museum of Art and History Director, Nina Simon, writes:

*“Communities are made of people with shared dreams, interests, and backgrounds. The more you understand them, the more easily you can unlock relevant experiences with them…The most powerful way to gain access to a new community is not be creating programming or marketing campaigns you think might fit their interests. Instead it starts with networking…Listen to their interests and concerns. The more you understand what matters to them and what experiences they seek, the better you can assess whether and how you can connect with them.”*

How do we make those connections with the variety of communities that live in the SCPL service area? We should check in with the people we think we know, but we also need to have conversations with people we don’t see in the Library.

Harwood is an Institute for Public Innovation that has formed a partnership with the American Library Association to encourage libraries to “Turn Outward.” Carlton Sears of the Institute writes: “Turning outward means that we ask crucial questions that get at the heart of what community members desire for their town.” Richard Harwood, founder of the Institute, says that Libraries are the perfect organizations to ask those questions: “ …libraries are some of the most trusted institutions in our nation’s communities, making them a good place to start conversations. Community is the reference point for the approach of turning outward…” (American Libraries, January 22, 2015)

SCPL, then, needs to assess where it can have an impact, know where it can fit in, and engage with others.

**Process**

In the months of September and October 2016, Library Staff, Library Advisory Commissioners, and Friends of the Library will go out into the community to initiate conversations with individuals, small groups, and organizations.

17 staff people comprise the internal Library Strategic Planning Steering Committee. The Library Advisory Commissioners will serve as the external steering committee. The two committees will begin going out into the community to start conversations in September. Each person will talk to two people they know and two people they don’t know. Following a very short list of prompts, they will ask people to describe their communities including both the rewards and challenges of living in them. Staff will ask people to reflect on the goals of their communities and how they think progress could be made toward those goals. Finally together, they’ll brainstorm the ways the Library might fit into solutions and strategies on the issues identified. All conversations will be documented and the interviewers will note a demographic description of the participants, i.e. hispanic female middle-aged small business owner; white male software engineer with three children in school; black female college student with two part-time jobs. Friends of the Library will be encouraged to be interviewers also.

On October 10, preliminary results from the first interviews will be shared at Staff Day. Staff will practice the interview protocol with support from experienced interviewers, and will be invited to conduct interviews in the community if they are interested.

From October 15-November 15, community meetings at each branch will be held to invite community comment. From September to November 15, there will also be opportunities for community members to contribute to the information gathering via social media.

**Benchmarking and Data Analytics**

Through the next two months, the SCPL will do a detailed benchmarking study using the California State Library statistics.

Through an affiliation with the Peninsula Library Partnerships (PLP), Santa Cruz Public Libraries will also have been able to access a new data resource, Gale Cengage Analytics on Demand. This product allows the Libraries to have access to detailed analysis of SCPL household level data to better understand communities’ and patrons’ needs. It will allow the system to understand variabilities in customer demographics and use by branch.

**Analysis and Patterns**

The Steering Committee will begin looking for patterns in the data/stories from the documented conversations/community meetings/ data analysis near the end of October.

Analysis will continue into November with updates to the Library Joint Powers Board, Library Commissioners, and Library staff.

**Recommendations**

In mid-November, writing will begin with the goal of having a final draft of recommendations by December 31, 2016 to present to the Joint Powers Board on January 5, 2017.

The Library expects the Turn Outward process of checking in with the community to continue as branches, services, and programs develop. SCPL intends to be proactive in learning community values and goals as it finds ways for the Library to fit into solutions and community progress. Community engagement will always be our first step.

September 1, 2016