



ESSEX LIBRARY  
ASSOCIATION



**Strategic Plan**

*July 1, 2013 – June 30, 2016*

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*With assistance from Library Development Solutions, Princeton, NJ*

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## Introduction

The Essex Library has been a vital community institution since 1889. Its beginnings were humble – a collection of approximately 500 donated books housed in rented space that was managed by a small group of volunteers. Since that time, the Library has grown to become a modern, professionally staffed organization with a collection of nearly 50,000 items in a beautiful, 9,500 square foot facility that was recently expanded and renovated. Much has been accomplished through the efforts of many community minded individuals who dedicated their time and energy to help the Library meet the growing needs of the community. Carrying on that tradition, this Strategic Plan endeavors to meet the needs of the community and position the Library to serve future generations.

## Mission

Simply stated, the mission of the Essex Library is to: ***Serve as the community's center for lifelong learning and cultural enrichment.*** Learning can take many forms and approaches when covering a population with diverse needs ranging from literacy programs for preschoolers to retirement questions for seniors. Citizens of all ages are invited to use the Library's services and facilities as they engage in their individual and collective lifelong learning endeavors. The Library is committed to providing the necessary talent and resources required to achieve its mission.

## Goals

The fact that the Library is visited over 60,000 times per year suggests that the Library meets the Community's needs in important ways. However, it is critical for the Library to stay current with the rapidly changing ways people obtain information, technology and the needs of patrons. This Strategic Plan will serve as the blueprint for the Library's Board and staff for the next three years, providing organizational structure while remaining nimble to adapt to the evolving needs of our patrons and community.

Essex Library, with its comfortable, well-appointed furnishings, is a lively, vibrant place that is well loved by its patrons. It has a warm, welcoming and friendly environment along with an organizational culture that encourages community outreach. Its well-trained, professional staff excels in customer service while providing interesting and stimulating programs that appeal to a broad range of patrons. Essex Library maintains a collection of fresh, relevant materials, in both traditional and digital formats as well as for its strong, award-winning Children's and Young Adult Services departments.

Building on this solid base, it is clear that there will always be areas requiring improvement to help meet the Library's mission. To this end, the Essex Library has set the following Goals, Objectives and Strategies to be accomplished over the next three years.

## **Goal I: Enhance the user experience of all stakeholders**

### **Objective 1 – Create and maintain a more useful balance of materials in existing and emerging formats**

- Evaluate the collections in order to improve the balance of new, traditional, and emerging formats.
- “Right size” the collections by creating space for new materials, while maintaining a core of items that belong in every public library.
- Ensure that the Library’s collections continue to have an emphasis that reflects the interests of the community.

### **Objective 2 – Improve the lines of communication between the Library and the community**

- Create a Marketing Plan as a guide to implement ideas set forth by a Marketing Committee composed of Library staff and Board members, as well as other community members with relevant experience.
- Deploy a method for continuous feedback from the community in order to ensure that its expectations are understood and, whenever possible met or exceeded.
- Identify new methods of community outreach so that the entire Essex community is aware of, and uses, the Library’s services.
- Enhance the Library’s role as an information resource through such means as creating a Community Calendar on its website.

### **Objective 3 – Expand the Library’s scope of services**

- Provide challenging opportunities for self-development or for engaging new experiences.
- Explore both traditional and non-traditional ways to bring learning opportunities to our patrons.
- Work closely with the school system to provide appropriate complementary support to our town’s students, particularly as it applies to the “Common Core” curriculum standards.
- Evaluate and implement expansion of the Library’s hours of operation in a manner that is consistent with financial resources and professional requirements.
- Explore new and creative ways that the Library can serve the community, i.e., become an emergency services center as a complement to the services provided by the Town of Essex.
- Develop an updated a list of items to meet patrons’ needs which are not covered by the current budget, i.e., expanding Library services, collections and use of existing floor/exterior space.

## **Goal II: Develop the capabilities required to meet the Library's mission**

### **Objective 4 – Achieve strong leadership support in the Board of Trustees**

- Recruit members of the community to serve on its Board of Trustees who have the time, interest and talents needed to become a Library Trustee.
- Ensure that members of the Library's Board of Trustees represent a broad cross section of the community.

### **Objective 5 – Maintain a professional, well trained staff**

- Recruit and hire staff members who meet the competency requirements for the Library's specific job descriptions.
- Require staff members to participate in continuing education opportunities on a regular basis.
- Provide an appropriate level of staff compensation and benefits which is commensurate with similar public libraries.
- Ensure that a courteous, respectful and friendly attitude characterizes all dealings of staff with patrons.

### **Objective 6 – Ensure fluency in both current and emerging technologies**

- Create a Technology Plan for the Library that will serve as a road map for acquiring new technologies as well as for better use of tools currently in place.
- Maintain familiarity with and implement the use of best library practices in emerging technologies particularly as it applies to the Children's and Youth Services Departments.
- Provide electronic devices that meet patrons' needs in a manner that is affordable both for the Library and potential users.
- Work with publishers, wholesalers and library organizations to advocate for equal access to digital content for libraries and library users.

### **Objective 7 – Create and maintain comfortable and functional user spaces both in the interior and exterior of the Library building**

- Evaluate the Library's interior physical space on an ongoing basis and make changes and adaptations as necessary to accommodate patrons' needs.
- Create an interior plan designed to optimize the Library's existing floor space in such a way as to meet the sometimes-conflicting needs of patrons who want a quiet place to work or study as well as those who use it as a social gathering space.
- Evaluate the Library's exterior space to make the parking lot and grounds an attractive, useful place for all patrons.

**Goal III: Secure a sustainable financial model that provides the resources required to accomplish Essex Library's mission**

**Objective 8 – Require that the Board of Trustees Development Committee identify ways to ensure the Library's long-term financial viability**

- Establish targets for increasing the value of the Library's endowment and develop a plan to achieve annual objectives.
- Prioritize legacy giving as a major funding opportunity for the Library.
- Increase the number of dues paying members.
- Utilize the publicity surrounding the Library's 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary to increase community support as well as contributions to the Annual Fund.
- Identify simplified ways to solicit funding by adapting tactics to different potential supporters.
- Pursue grant writing opportunities and major gifts.
- Explore potential funding streams from value added services provided to the community, i.e., scanning and fax services.

**Objective 9 – Strengthen the Library's partnership with the Town of Essex in order to secure reliable and growing financial support**

- Promote awareness regarding the benefits of Town's financial contribution.
- Participate in relevant Town committees and in the Town's budgeting cycle.
- Work proactively with Town officials to develop an increased funding level.

**Objective 10 – Develop partnerships with businesses, cultural institutions, professional organizations and schools**

- Target local businesses and organizations and regional foundations in order to broaden financial support.
- Partner with cultural institutions (Goodspeed Opera House, Ivoryton Playhouse, etc.) to expand the Library's programs offering.
- Identify and cultivate mutually rewarding relationships with business owners and professionals who reside in the community but work out of town.
- Expand and explore new ways to cultivate the Library's partnerships with local schools in order to improve resource sharing and help fulfill its mission to provide lifelong learning opportunities.

## **The Process**

The Planning Committee consisted of members of the Board of Trustees, staff and the community. The Board and the Planning Committee also engaged the services of Library Development Solutions of Princeton, N.J. The Planning Committee synthesized information, identified priorities, considered internal strengths and weaknesses, external threats and opportunities, and identified possible future strategic directions for the Essex Library. Particular attention was paid to responses from a community survey and from personal interviews with Essex residents. As part of the process some committee members also conducted a tour of area libraries for the purpose of widening their knowledge of library facilities and services. The committee also read and discussed recent articles about nation-wide trends in publishing, computing, library and information services.

### **Survey, Interviews, Library Tours**

- During the planning process, the consultants conducted one on one interviews with library staff and area residents to gather comments and suggestions about the future for the Library.
- Additional suggestions came from 476 people who responded to a library survey, both online and in print. This successful effort generated many suggestions regarding desired services and the facility, as well as many comments about current library services.
- Members of the Planning Committee also conducted their own interviews with neighbors and friends.

### **Planning Committee Meetings**

The Planning Committee, over the course of several meetings, did the following:

- Identified social, technological, and demographic trends that may affect delivery of library services.
- Considered Essex Library's internal strengths and its capacity to deliver excellent and responsive library service.
- Articulated the challenges the Library will face, particularly with regard to access and funding in the future.
- Developed a revised vision and mission statement describing the Library's primary purpose.
- Discussed and agreed upon goals to guide the Essex Library's development for the next few years and a specific and flexible action plan.

### **Board of Trustees Approval**

The strategic plan was approved by the Essex Library Association, Board of Trustees on July 17, 2013.