

Bethlehem Area Public Library  
**Strategic Plan 2009-2011**

Introduction

The Bethlehem Area Public Library is a dynamic public service organization whose mission is to meet the educational, informational, cultural and recreational needs of the residents of its six-community service area. In the current economically challenging climate, the public library becomes an increasingly vital source of free access to information and entertainment as well as an important community gathering place.

The Planning Process

This Strategic Plan is designed following the guidelines set forth in Strategic Planning for Results by Sandra Nelson for the Public Library Association (Chicago: American Library Association, 2008). The plan differs from many other models of strategic planning in that it focuses on the result to the end-user of the service, rather than the process of planning itself. The necessity of planning comes from several areas. The first is that the Bethlehem Area Public Library has not had a written strategic plan since the mid 1980's, and it is important to have a roadmap for where we want to go in order to remain relevant to the communities we serve. Secondly, our buildings are getting older and we are in need of structural and organizational updating. A current and valid plan is vital to the success of any projects that rely on donations or grants, such as our new initiative to expand the Youth Services area called *Room to Grow*.

The steps which led to this Strategic Plan were:

1. Forming a planning committee made up of the Executive Director, the five Coordinators (Administrative Services, Public Services, Youth Services, Financial Services, and Technical/IT Services), plus key staff members, and a Board member.
2. Familiarizing everyone with the PLA Planning for Results model.
3. Creating a public survey that was geared to the Planning for Results model, to obtain opinions of users about priorities for library service.
4. Running the survey for one month and tabulating results. The survey was sent out to over 9,000 residents via e-mail, our Web site at [www.bapl.org](http://www.bapl.org), and on paper at the Main Library, South Side

- Branch, and Bookmobile. Spanish language surveys were also available online and on paper.
5. Several more meetings of the planning committee to choose service responses (which are explained further below), set goals and objectives, and decide on appropriate future activities to implement the responses.

### Community Profile

The Bethlehem Area Public Library serves the City of Bethlehem, Townships of Bethlehem, Hanover, and Lower Saucon, and the Boroughs of Freemansburg and Fountain Hill. Based on the 2006 estimated census figures, the Bethlehem Area Public Library serves 124,653 residents. The library also provides district services to the western half of Northampton County, an additional 57,169 people. The service area is 84% white, 13% Hispanic, 2% black, and 2% other. The median age is 40, with 22.3% of the population under the age of 18, and 17.1% over the age of 65. Median family income is \$57,258, slightly higher than the national average; 9.74% of our population is below the poverty level, slightly lower than the national average. Only 18.12% of adults possess a college degree, about half of the national average of 37.4%. 15.05% have some college education, 21.05% have a high school degree, and 12.42% do not have a high school degree.

### Library Profile

The Bethlehem Public Library was founded in 1901 and located on the second floor of a commercial building at Main and Market Streets. Support for the library was erratic until 1924 when citizens voted in a designated tax. After this vote, Bethlehem Steel Corporation donated a building at Market and New Streets to the library. This was to be the library's main home until 1967 when federal funds, plus a generous gift from Bethlehem Globe-Times editor, Rolland Adams, spurred matching gifts from citizens to build a new library on Church Street. The library's South Side Branch occupied various schools and storerooms until the present building was built at Fourth and Webster Streets in 1931.

The library is funded by a combination of local taxes, State appropriations, fines, and private donations. The City of Bethlehem supplies 37.3% of the library's income, with the State supplying the next largest amount of 25.2%. The contracting communities contribute the following, based on population: Bethlehem Township – 11.3%; Lower Saucon Township – 5.3%; Hanover Township – 5.1%; Borough of Fountain Hill – 2.5%; Borough of Freemansburg – 1%.

The library employs 59 full- and part-time staff, and offers 208,235 cataloged items. The Main Library is approximately 41,000 square feet and is undergoing a major capital campaign ("*Room to Grow*") in order to utilize the second floor for public service to children, create a teen room on the first floor, and renovate and repurpose the space at the South Side Branch. Approximately 100 people per hour come through the doors of the Main Library. They come to check out materials for entertainment and education; use periodicals and newspapers; and access the free Internet service, either through the library's many public computers or through wifi on their own laptops.

Thousands of children attend the library's creative programs, in the forms of story times, summer reading programs, teen advisory board programs, or even reading to therapy dogs. Adults are also enjoying the library's new emphasis on offering informational and entertaining programs, including presentations on hobbies such as gardening or informational programs like learning to use the computer or avoiding scams for senior citizens.

### Challenges

Convincing non-users of the value and cost of good library service is the biggest challenge we face. Cuts in State aid or flat funding have been the norm rather than the exception in the past several years. As a result, we have to ask for more local support from communities that are trying to balance their own budgets in precarious economic times. The library needs to convince its residents that the return on their investment is very high and that a strong library leads to incoming wealth through an influx of residents that value education for their children as well as a community of informed citizens. Other challenges include parking, older buildings that are not energy efficient or up to code in all areas, and having enough room to serve children, who use more than 33% of the library's services, yet have only 7% of its floor space.

## Service Responses

Library Service Responses are the links between the community's needs, interests, and priorities and the programs and services that the library offers. The following Service Responses were chosen by culling the comments, ideas, and thoughts expressed by over a thousand residents of the library's service area through a survey conducted in February and March of 2009.

### Service Response I: **Create Young Readers**

Goal: Children will have programs and services designed to ensure that they will enter school ready to learn to read, write, and listen. They will have materials and programs that stimulate their imaginations and provide pleasurable reading, viewing, and listening experiences.

- A. Objective: By 2011, increase open service hours at the South Side Branch from 33.5 hours per week to at least 54 hours per week.
  - 1. Activity: Explore staffing needs for expanded hours.
  - 2. Activity: Prepare a presentation to explain necessity and benefits of increased Branch hours.
  - 3. Activity: Increase number and variety of family programs offered at the South Side Branch, thereby increasing community interest and participation in Branch.
  
- B. Objective: By 2011, family programs will increase from twenty-eight (28) to forty (40) annually.
  - 1. Activity: Offer evening programs every other month.
  - 2. Activity: Schedule additional *Family Place* programming.
  - 3. Activity: Provide additional daytime family activities and offer programs when the schools are closed.
  
- C. Objective: By 2011, maintain a level of outreach programs of at least four hundred (400) annually.
  - 1. Activity: Each spring provide *Pennsylvania One Book* programming at preschools and daycares in the library's service area.
  - 2. Activity: Promote the summer reading program in public and private elementary schools.
  - 3. Activity: Participate in community events.
  
- D. Objective: By 2011, a minimum of twenty-five hundred (2,500) children will annually participate in the summer reading program.
  - 1. Activity: Design entertaining and age-appropriate programming to attract children.

2. Activity: Purchase materials for the collection that match each year's theme.
  3. Activity: Encourage school visits by outreach librarian.
- E. Objective: By 2011, the use of subscription-based juvenile online resources will increase by fifty percent (50%).
1. Activity: Create fliers that explain and promote the resources.
  2. Activity: Train staff on the use of the resources.
  3. Activity: Promote the use of resources through workshops for teachers and students.
- F. Objective: Anticipate a successful *Room to Grow* campaign.
1. Activity: Weed Youth Services and the Branch's collection to increase shelf space.
  2. Activity: Participate in fundraisers to raise awareness of the library's value to the community and the *Room to Grow* project.
  3. Activity: Purchase child-friendly and comfortable furniture and shelving.
  4. Activity: Be a part of the planning process to create functional, environmentally-sensitive, and attractive spaces at the Main Library and the Branch.

Service Response II: **Stimulate Imagination: Reading, Viewing, and Listening for Pleasure**

Goal: Children, Teens, and Adults will have materials and programs that respond to their current interests and provide pleasurable reading, viewing, and listening experiences.

- A. Objective: The circulation of materials for children, teens, and adults will increase at least five percent (5%) over three (3) years, by year-end 2011.
1. Activity: Keep collections up to date and responsive to customer demand.
  2. Activity: Aggressively use "Holds Reorder Report" to keep up with patron demand for popular titles.
  3. Activity: Purchase additional materials yearly as long as material budget increases.
- B. Objective: By 2011, a minimum of eighty-five percent (85%) of the patrons surveyed will indicate that they found something good to read, listen to, or view at the library.

1. Activity: The searchability of the online catalog will help patrons find materials they want.
  2. Activity: With the expertise of the Information Department, patrons will get help in locating materials they need.
  3. Activity: Continue to display and market materials to make users aware of available resources.
- C. Objective: The size of the audiovisual collection for children, teens, and adults will increase at least five percent (5%) annually.
1. Activity: Increase the purchasing amount of circulating electronic resources (e.g. playaways).
  2. Activity: Keep collections up to date and responsive to customer demand.
- D. Objective: The scope of the audiovisual collection for children, teens, and adults will include a larger selection of DVD's and downloadable audiobooks with more compatible playing formats, by year-end 2011.
1. Activity: Keep collections up to date and responsive to customer demand.
  2. Activity: Purchase more audiobooks, in a variety of media formats, including downloadables.
- E. Objective: Teen patrons will have a comfortable welcoming place to call their own in the Main Library and South Side Branch.
1. Activity: Create a Teen Room in the Main Library in the current Children's Room, which is to be vacated when the Children's Room relocates to the second floor. Enhance teen space at the South Side Branch via displays, furnishings and lighting.
  2. Activity: Encourage programming by and for teens within their space, which will include comfortable seating and a stage for performances in the Main Library, and a special seating and display area in the South Side Branch.
  3. Activity: Seek input from teens, via the Teen Advisory Board, surveys, and focus groups concerning their preferences and ideas for the new space.

Service Response III: **Understand How to Find, Evaluate, and Use Information**

Information Fluency: Residents will know when they need information to resolve an issue or answer a question and will have the skills to search for, locate, evaluate, and effectively use information to meet their needs in an increasingly electronic environment.

Goal 1: Patrons will be familiar with and will use library electronic collections when appropriate to their needs.

Objective: By the end of 2011, raise patron awareness of electronic resources to fifty percent (50%) of those surveyed. The number of pages examined within our electronic subscriptions will have increased by at least fifteen percent (15%) by the end of 2011.

1. Activity: Develop and offer training in use of databases and other information tools.
2. Activity: By the end of 2011, further diversify and increase the number of available electronic information resources by ten percent (10%).
3. Activity: Experiment with different web and print-based approaches to presenting our electronic subscriptions in a clear and inviting manner.

Goal 2: The library will provide support, research tools, and training in order to provide patrons with easy access to community and government information and programs.

Objective: By the end of 2011, fifty percent (50%) of patrons surveyed will be aware that the library provides useful access to community and governmental services and resources.

1. Activity: The library will provide web-based content which will help patrons locate information concerning government agencies, services, groups, and other items of local interest.
2. Activity: The library will encourage and participate in cooperative information-sharing activities among area organizations and governmental groups.
3. Activity: The library will offer at least four (4) special programs annually which relate to community, state, or federal programs and resources.

Goal 3: Patrons will be more aware of the full range of library services, equipment, and facilities available to them.

Objective: By the end of 2011, fifty percent (50%) of those patrons surveyed will be aware of at least one specialized library service such as bookmobile service, homebound delivery, and interlibrary loan service.

1. Activity: Annually a minimum of fifty (50) brochures, fliers and/or posters will be developed, updated, and made available or accessible at the library.
2. Activity: The library Web site will provide easily-accessible and clearly arranged information concerning library services.
3. Activity: At least fifteen (15) tours or external speaking engagements annually will provide information to the general public concerning library services.

#### Service Response IV: **Satisfy Curiosity: Lifelong Learning**

Goal: Adults will have the resources they need to explore topics of personal interest and continue to learn throughout their lives.

- A. Objective: The circulation of adult nonfiction materials will increase at least five percent (5%) over three (3) years, by year-end 2011.
  1. Activity: Ensure collection is up to date, in good condition, and responsive to current events.
  2. Activity: Merchandize nonfiction collections in all in-house formats.
  3. Activity: Tie collection to programming – display relevant titles.
- B. Objective: By the end of 2011, eighty-five percent (85%) of adults surveyed who were looking for information or materials to explore a topic of personal interest will indicate that the library's collection was very good or excellent.
  1. Activity: Create and conduct a survey.
  2. Activity: Create a virtual suggestion box for patrons to suggest items for purchase.
- C. Objective: By the end of 2011, a minimum of eighty-five percent (85%) of adults who attended a program at the library will evaluate the program as very good or excellent.
  1. Activity: Develop an evaluation method for programs.
  2. Activity: Train staff in programming skills (introductions, operation of equipment, evaluations, follow-ups).



- D. Objective: By the end of 2011, adult programs will increase by thirty-three percent (33%).
  - 1. Activity: Begin book discussion group.
  - 2. Activity: Continue to increase the diversity of programming.
  - 3. Activity: Survey patrons to determine needs and areas of interest.
  - 4. Partner with other community organizations to provide programming.
  
- E. Objective: Create a café area in the Main Library to encourage patrons to visit the library, enjoy their time while seeking out continuing learning opportunities, and mingle with others who partake of the complete community library experience.
  - 1. Activity: Actively seek interested vendors who could provide a variety of beverages and snacks for the library community.
  - 2. Activity: Create an extended space on the porch of the library where patrons can sit at tables, enjoy their beverages while using library materials and thereby encourage passers-by to come into the library to see for themselves all that we have to offer.

### Implementation

This planning document was initiated in the early part of 2009, and completed at the end of the first quarter of that year. The Executive Director and the Coordinators of the Bethlehem Area Public Library will be responsible for implementing the activities that will help the library reach the goals and objectives of each Service Response. The management team will be reviewing these activities and how they support the strategic plan at every step over the next two and three-quarter years. The Board, Executive Director and Room to Grow Advisory Board will be working together to advocate for increases in hours and services, fundraise, and raise awareness of the Bethlehem Area Public Library in our communities. Our priorities of public service, outreach, and developing the children and teens of the community will be steering the *Room to Grow* capital campaign.

Strategic Planning Committee

Marie F. Sterlein, Secretary, Board of Trustees  
Janet S. Fricker, Executive Director  
Anita Barrick, Finance Division Coordinator  
Diane Davis, Administration/Circulation Division Coordinator  
Melanie Fiske, Youth Services Division Coordinator  
Jane Gill, Public Services Division Coordinator  
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