



Transforming Library Spaces for Community Engagement

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Transforming Library Spaces for Community Engagement

Today's libraries are active community hubs that encourage personal enrichment, meaningful collaboration and creation of content. As embedded community institutions, public libraries can provide accessible and flexible infrastructure for community gatherings, activities and civic engagement functions of all kinds, in addition to information access in multiple formats. Expanding library capacity in this community engagement role presents opportunities for evolution in physical space and resources that connect people with both their local and global community.

From May 2013 – June 2014, OCLC WebJunction partnered with public libraries in Washington State to explore practical and adaptable solutions for public library space transformation. This exploration was made possible by funding from the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation, and was brought to life by active public library engagement in focus groups, webinars and space conversions at two public libraries. The following libraries were selected to work with WebJunction as pilot locations for community-driven space transformation, and in so doing, provided excellent library perspective to inform the recommendations in this guide. The full case studies are included in the [Space Planning in Action](#) section of this guide.



Bellingham Public Library – Central Library

Bellingham Public Library (BPL) serves the 82,000+ residents of the city of Bellingham, Washington, circulating 1.6 million items annually to more than 47,000 registered cardholders. In 2012, the total collection size was 236,979 items, with a circulation of 1,638,730 items; visits totaled 842,242. The transformation of space described here took place at the downtown Central Library location.

For its space transformation, BPL created a SkillShare space, to encourage nimble community meeting, learning and discovery. Beth Farley, Head of Information and Reader Services, was designated to lead the implementation of the space transformation project.

Everson Branch of the Whatcom County Library System (WCLS)

Everson is a small community of about 3,000 residents located in Whatcom County, Washington, 15 miles northeast of Bellingham on the banks of the Nooksack River in the foothills of the Cascade Mountains. The library has a collection of 25,500 items and a staff of 12 plus two adjuncts.

For its space transformation, the Everson Branch created the Nooksack Valley Heritage Center, to strengthen and sustain the community's pride in its history and heritage. Everson Branch Manager Eileen Shaw led the project development, with support from new Director Christine Perkins and Regan Robinson, Public Services Manager for WCLS.

WebJunction Space Planning Resources

Many of the resources from this project are available online in [WebJunction's Space Planning section](#), and are referenced throughout this guide. WebJunction also provides recommended competencies related to community-oriented facilities planning and management in the Facilities section (p. 26) of the *Competency Index for the Library Field 2014*. Links to access all resources are included as a comprehensive list at the end of this guide. This guide has been created to frame lessons learned from this project into a clear outline of primary considerations for public libraries seeking cost-effective ideas for transforming existing physical infrastructure into space that encourages community engagement and collaboration.

This guide is targeted to public library staff, volunteers or other stakeholders currently involved in or considering reinventing space to enhance community engagement in their library building, large or small.

It is built on the following assumptions:

- *Library space transformations are not equivalent to capital projects (though capital projects can benefit from the recommendations put forth in this guide); both processes are strengthened by community input, clear milestones and intentional communication.*
- *There is no one solution that works for every community, every building, every space or every library team.*
- *Flexibility of process and flexibility of design can help your library achieve space-planning goals with energy, enthusiasm and impact.*

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This guide contains the following sections and objectives, with supporting resources throughout:

- **Create a Community Vision:** Recognize the role of community input in a space planning process, and access strategies for obtaining this input to guide your efforts and related communications with internal and external stakeholders.
- **Design Your Space:** Gain familiarity with the intersecting technical and creative considerations for launching a space transformation, and how to implement those considerations at your library.
- **Sustain Your Space:** Consider how community engagement in a space transformation can happen at every stage of the process, whether in the planning, in the design or in the implementation of services or programs in the space.
- **Space Planning in Action:** Learn more about the space planning process from the unique perspectives of Bellingham Public Library and Everson Library, two libraries that have implemented transformations with their communities.
- A **Project Planning 101** section is included as an Appendix to this guide. This section reviews best practices to launch a space-planning project with a process oriented mindset, and provides sample worksheets to support the planning and execution of your space transformation.

Create a Community Vision

Recognize the role of community input in a space-planning process, and access strategies for obtaining this input to guide your efforts and related communications with internal and external stakeholders.



A brief overview of steps to create and maintain a community vision for your library space. It is an ongoing process that allows for the refinement of your vision and identification of potentially new community stakeholders.

Libraries exist to serve communities, and it is from the community that a vision for engagement with the library should come. Because community members will be using the space, their input on **what they would like to accomplish** and **how they would like to feel** in a library space is paramount. Intentionally evolving library space in tandem with patron interests, beyond books, positions libraries as hubs that sustain strong and enriched communities.

Libraries have proven tremendously adept at creating mechanisms for gathering community input. Beyond the daily, interpersonal interactions with community members accessing resources or participating in programs, libraries use feedback forms, brown-bag lunches, surveys and social media dialogue to stay engaged with what matters to their communities. This engagement is critical for the success of any space transformation effort, whether your library has already identified a space to transform, or is just beginning to explore the process.

Clarify your goal for undertaking a space transformation

In both pilot libraries, it took significant communication and planning with community members to identify what the space transformation was going to entail. Establishing a community vision is an iterative process, requiring flexibility in execution. However, when you begin the process of seeking community input, it is useful to have a strong internal understanding among your library staff about why you are undertaking the process.

Work to ensure that all team members are on the same page about:

- *Why your library has chosen to embark on community-driven space transformation at this particular time; and*
- *What impact you hope to have when this work is complete, for your library and for your community.*

The Project for Public Spaces provides Eleven Principles for Creating Great Community Places. Number one on this list states that “the community is the expert.”

Identify stakeholders

Beyond your standard internal library stakeholders, what other types of individuals or organizations in your community might bring fresh or powerful thinking to a vision of library space? How might their stakeholders benefit from a transformed library space? Libraries in our pilot communities achieved incredible reach in the types of organizations they obtained input from, and even had community members volunteer to contribute their services and expertise to the library space.

Examples of these diverse stakeholders included:

- *Arts organizations*
- *Bicycle clubs*
- *Community colleges*
- *Faith-based organizations*
- *Farming and gardening associations*
- *Historical preservationists*
- *Local businesses*
- *National retailers*
- *Schools*
- *Senior centers*
- *State parks*
- *University extension programs.*

Extending your thinking and reach with stakeholders facilitates community buy-in, as well as great potential for launching new partner relationships.

Seek input

As mentioned above, library staff members are skilled at obtaining community input in a number of ways, ranging from low-touch to high-tech. **Once you know why you are seeking input and from whom, spend time thinking about what you want to know.**



Some examples of the things your library might want to know or questions you might want to ask to inform your space transformation include:

- *What is your favorite space in this library? Why?*
- *What is your least favorite space in this library? Why? What could be done to improve it?*
- *How do you like to feel when you are visiting the library? What do you think can be done with the library space to help you feel that way?*
- *Are there any interests or hobbies that you would like to pursue at the library? Who else in the community supports these interests or hobbies?*
- *Do you have any interest or skills with space planning, architecture or interior design that you would like to volunteer for a library space transformation?*

Identifying clear questions and objectives for stakeholder input will help you clarify the best ways to get that input, whether it is a one-time survey, series of focus groups or individual interviews, etc.

Communicate understanding

Once you've collected and reviewed input from your stakeholders, take time to reflect back to them what you have heard, and how it is informing your thinking for a space-planning process. This is an excellent time to set and manage expectations for your transformation, as well as a communications protocol. A very basic communications table can help you do this, included in the Appendix as a *Project Communications Worksheet*.

Space planning is a not an entirely linear process, particularly when it is being done with existing or limited resources. It is important not to over-commit to steps that your library cannot take, and also frame the steps that you are taking as responsive to community needs. It is very normal to undergo shifts in course through a space-planning process, and you can enable those shifts to become positive opportunities through proactive communications.

Put input and understanding into action

Because your process of design and implementation will be iterative, be sure to document what you have learned and intend to do, and update this information frequently as the process evolves. A *Project Description Worksheet* is included in the Appendix to build, refine and share as you embark on bringing your community vision to life.



*As you reclaim your space
and begin to envision
its new function, strive
for flexibility.*



Design Your Space

*Gain familiarity with the intersecting technical and creative considerations for launching a space transformation, and how to implement those considerations at your library. As you move from community input to implementing your space transformation, it may be useful to approach with the objectives to **inventory**, **reclaim** and **create**.*

Inventory your space

Assess your space and its current assets in their present and desired state. What is the physical infrastructure like? What library materials or resources are available there? How are these items useful, or not, to the vision for your space that has been created with your community? How might these elements be improved for a transformation? Conducting a space inventory requires considering many elements of a space that are often overlooked. However, when implemented intentionally, your inventory can make the process of reclaiming and creating your space much more time- and cost-effective. In your assessment, include considerations related to areas such as:

- *Lighting*
- *Flooring*
- *Tables*
- *Chairs*
- *Shelving*
- *Power outlets*
- *Broadband/WiFi accessibility*
- *Current library materials or resources.*

A *Space Inventory Worksheet* is included in the Appendix, which may expedite this process for you. Remember to identify any decision makers whose input may be important for obtaining approvals to make changes to these items before actually doing so.

Reclaim your space

As part of creating your community vision, you will have established communication priorities for keeping various stakeholders informed of changes in your library space. As the transformation gets underway, be sure to revisit and implement that communications plan frequently, so that individuals are aware of the ultimate benefit that will come from this change. This is particularly important as you reclaim the space, specifically, as you remove infrastructure or materials to make way for a new vision.

WebJunction’s webinar and summary article on “Flexible Spaces, Flexible Futures” emphasize four key points for maximizing flexibility in your library space:

- 1. Space is elastic:** *Rather than designate a fixed space for a singular activity, consider how your space can be used for multiple purposes. Envisioning multi-use space can meet community goals, while promoting functionality.*
- 2. Furniture rocks and rolls:** *Movable furniture, such as tables, shelves or chairs on casters, facilitates flexible spaces.*
- 3. Patrons find the path:** *Easily navigable layouts promote patron discovery. Clear, consistent signage can support this, and also be a fun design element.*
- 4. Collections are slender and modern:** *Reclaiming your space may include removing long-standing equipment, or shelving, weeding or transferring established collections.*

Community-oriented library spaces are flexible by design, in order to accommodate shifting user needs and the ongoing integration of physical and digital resources. Be sure to verify your library's deselection/weeding policy. Although this can seem like a daunting process, many excellent resources exist to help make it straightforward. [The American Library Association provides a fact sheet](#) of annotated resources on collection development, selection, evaluation and weeding. The [DeClutter Your Collections presentation from the Association for Rural and Small Libraries](#) provides excellent insight into the barriers to weeding collections, and compelling reasons to overcome them. One of these reasons includes creating space for other things that community members value, such as seating, equipment and programs. The King County Public Library System, inspired by [Sheena Iyengar's studies on Choice Overload](#), and leveraging its own tracking metrics, identified that when collections are reduced significantly, circulation actually increases. They recommend a formula of **five items per square foot**. Decluttering the collection focuses the resources, makes items more findable and allows more space for the kinds of programming that the community enjoys.

Create your space

By now you've gathered community input and carefully assessed and curated your library space. Now you are ready to pull the final pieces together to establish the physical space that will support your community's vision! This can be done quite efficiently and at relatively low cost, particularly if you focus on the fundamentals. It's amazing what a fresh coat of paint or reconfiguration of furniture can do to make a space inviting and productive. [Library Journal's "Library by Design"](#) section includes a number of library facility and design recommendations for inspiration. Specifically, [10 Steps to a Better Library Interior](#) by Traci Lesneski recommends affordable design principles, with specific library examples, that can be applied to any undertaking, regardless of budget. These include:

- *See with your customer's eyes*
- *Remove barriers*
- *Use less for more impact*
- *Unclutter*
- *Consider the whole*
- *Support how humans use space*
- *Zone your interior*
- *Create a variety of experiences*
- *Light to shape space*
- *Embrace color.*

Referring back to some of the elements you identified as part of your inventory, very simple design considerations might include:

- **Technical considerations:** *Electrical and Internet connections are in high demand—patrons will cluster around available outlets. Identify ways to configure the space to maximize access. If your space emphasizes digital technologies, focus on software/hardware solutions that require little staff support and don't have high ongoing costs for technical support, upgrades, etc. Consider technologies that can make your space more interactive and engaging, and how you can repurpose technology that you already have to meet your needs.*
- **Lighting:** *Are there simple upgrades or rearrangements of furnishings you can make to provide more natural light, or bring visual interest to your light fixtures? Does the light in your space serve the purpose of the space?*
- **Shelving:** *Are there opportunities to integrate/display mixed media resources on your shelves, or improve accessibility for physical and digital resources simultaneously?*
- **Flooring:** *Is there a way to upgrade a section of your flooring with a creative solution to make it stand out? Does your project require special flooring to meet the needs of the types of activities that will take place there? Will a nice area rug serve to set your space apart?*
- **Tables and chairs:** *Are they appropriate for the target audience and purpose? Tables and chairs for a children's storytime area may be very different than those for an adult collaboration center. Selecting furniture that is durable, easy to clean and easy to move can promote maximum flexibility in your space. Choosing smaller tables increases the flexibility for rearranging in different configurations.*

The exciting prospect about designing flexible, community-centered space is that it can be done in a way that celebrates change.

There is no need to get every element of your new space “just right,” as it will evolve with use and time. You can experiment with design elements that are achievable, resourceful and responsive to community needs, and solicit feedback in meaningful ways, without being a professional designer.

To that end, if you feel like your project would benefit from design guidance or expertise, look to your local community to see if there are designers, architects, contractors or space planners who may be willing to volunteer their services.

Volunteer subject matter experts provided enthusiastic and central partnerships to the transformations in the pilot communities.





“Communities sharing knowledge is the only way to have a healthy community.”

– Bellingham Public Library patron

Sustain Your Space

Consider how community engagement in a space transformation can happen at every stage of the process, whether in the planning, in the design or in the implementation of services or programs in the space.

Seek partner support and contributions

Effective partnerships strengthen community populations and the programs that serve them. In your community visioning process, you identified stakeholders who might benefit from or be interested in your library space and related opportunities. Reach out to them with information about options to be involved. This could include a request to lend subject matter expertise or donate resources to the transformation itself, or collaborate on programming support and information services when the space is activated. Your library space can provide great visibility for other local organizations, so continue to explore these connections.

Spread the word

Use your established communication priorities and partner networks to spread the word about your community space. Hold a launch event when it is ready, and share details through local media. Aim to strike a tone in your communication that reflects the way you want people to feel in your space. Use colorful and creative signage in the space to let people know what goes on there and when. Include details on your space and programming or services in regular library communications, and invite current or potential community partners to do the same.

Promote dynamic use

It may be that your space was designed to serve a very particular community goal, such as board gaming programs or employment resource services. However, it may be possible to support secondary programs or services along with these primary objectives. Opening up a space to the community opens up the possibilities. Pay attention to how and when your space is used for its primary intended purposes. If you find that usage ebbs or flows on a somewhat consistent pattern, think of alternate ways to fill the slower times. For example, perhaps board gaming happens in your space most frequently on weeknights with teens, though much less frequently during the daytime and weekend hours. Perhaps gaming programs could be encouraged with other audiences, such as senior citizens, or incorporated in early learning activities at the library during the day.

Or, if individuals seeking employment resource services in your space also have questions about continuing education opportunities in your community, expand your collection to address those questions. Remember that your space is fluid and adaptable!

Maintain community-oriented ownership of space

Consistently seek community input. This may be an established process at your library that can be extended to include your new space. Or, it could be something as simple as making comment forms available in the space, or asking for written or verbal feedback at the end of programming.

Examples of prompting questions to obtain meaningful feedback will sound familiar from the community vision work, and can include items such as:

- *What does this space allow you to accomplish?*
- *How can we continue to make this or other library spaces relevant to you?*

As your library seeks community input, you may continue to refine the design and function of your space. This flexibility is indicative of the immense possibility for public libraries at the intersection of community engagement, diverse technologies and embedded physical institutions—to evolve in innovative and creative ways that reflect their unique community identities and create pathways for meaningful engagement for all.

Space Planning in Action

Read on for full summaries of the pilot projects at Bellingham Public Library and Everson Branch Library.

SkillShare at Bellingham Public Library

About Bellingham Public Library

Bellingham Public Library (BPL) serves the 82,000+ residents of the city of Bellingham, Washington, circulating 1.6 million items annually to more than 47,000 registered cardholders. In 2012, the total collection size was 236,979 items, with a circulation of 1,638,730 items; visits totaled 842,242. The transformation of space described here took place at the downtown Central Library location.

Beth Farley, Head of Information and Reader Services, was designated to lead the implementation of the space transformation project. Quotations are from Farley.

Responding to community needs

The original BPL plan for the space enhancement was to create DIY (Do It Yourself) kits on various subjects of interest to the community, and to partner with community members and organizations to share their expertise in those subjects. To gather community input, an 11-question online survey focused on the development of proposed specialized collections, specifically DIY resources.

Questions included:

- *What DIY interest areas or hobbies do you already actively pursue?*
- *How frequently do you access Bellingham Public Library for resources to support these interests?*
- *What are new DIY interest areas or hobbies that you'd like to pursue?*

Library staff distributed a link to the survey to a wide range of community participants. There were 127 responses to the survey; nearly half of the respondents (47%) were age 55+, and 98% reported that they possessed a Bellingham Public Library card. Survey responses did indeed surface a list of varied, high interest themes, reflecting a curious and dynamic community.

Respondents identified a variety of local resources in addition to the library to support their interests, including the Internet and other people. But the “Aha!” embedded in the results came from the number of open-ended comments that expressed interest in a space to make connections, to meet, to collaborate, with BPL as the convener.



(before)
Bellingham Public Library
stacks

“The library has meeting rooms.

We wanted to create a space that was more nimble, flexible, visible and inclusive than a traditional library meeting room.

We wanted to take the gathering/meeting out of the room...where people could choose to easily engage or disengage in the activity.

We wanted a space that was discoverable, serendipitous, different.

Hey, what might be happening in SkillShare today?!”

Alignment and buy-in

BPL had recently completed a five-year strategic plan (2013–2017) based on extensive input gathered through numerous stakeholder, public and staff meetings, and other community sources.

The plan highlights four strategic directions: *Read, Learn, Meet, Discover*.

“When discussing the concept of SkillShare with the Library Board and staff, it was easy to see how SkillShare fit in with our strategic goals.”

The concept of a SkillShare space was shared internally early in the development process. Department supervisors shared the information with their work groups and Beth sent out periodic updates as changes were happening in the physical space.

“I also emphasized in communications that this was an opportunity to experiment and to try something new. In general staff were very supportive of providing this type of programming space and of developing new partnerships in the community.”

During the few months that it took to complete the space configurations, the curiosity of community members was naturally aroused. A small and intriguing sign stimulated anticipation of what was coming soon.

Reclaiming space

To carve out some open space in the “in our face” location near the entrance and across from the circulation desk, something had to go. The adult music CD collection occupied that space. This was an opportunity to downsize the collection, since circulation had been dropping due to the availability of free music online. The new location for the slenderized CD collection held 40 shelves of nonfiction, which again required significant weeding and shifting. Staff are happy with the new location for the CD collection because it is more visible and less vulnerable to theft.

Designing and planning

Librarians are not trained in architecture or interior design, yet those are key skill sets for creating a successful space. Farley admitted to feeling “paralyzed” by the design element of space transformation. The community network came to her rescue. She first approached the local office equipment shop, with which the library had a long-standing relationship. However, the initial design proposal was “boring” and didn’t fit the expectation of a “new look and feel” for the space. The office store rep talked up the

library project to his local business group and aroused the interest of an architectural firm, the Zervas Group, which provided free consulting, contributing ideas for color, furniture and materials. The pro bono work was “invaluable” to bringing the space into being.

The glitches in the project seemed to center around the flooring. An early fun flooring idea to collage and laminate magazine and newspaper pages fell through when the carpet was removed to reveal an uneven subsurface unsuitable for the lamination. Instead the team chose to lay down Marmoleum, an environmentally friendly choice of materials. Unfortunately, the first shipment was badly damaged in transit, but the manufacturer quickly replaced the goods and the floor was finally installed with no further impediments.

More community support arrived in the form of city facilities staff, who installed the data and electrical connections. The Friends of the Library funded a large digital screen to add an interactive technology piece to the space.

Partnerships

The potential for working with various groups in the community instigated discussions about co-sponsorship policies. Realizing that it was important to be selective about program partners, BPL developed a SkillShare Proposal Form to screen proposals. The form describes the library’s interests (“Sparking creativity through content creation,” “opportunities to build skills,” etc.) and asks for the presenter’s background and qualifications.

(after)
**Bellingham Public Library
SkillShare**



Programming

BPL staff had an early surprise confirmation of how patrons would receive their transformation of space and the introduction of SkillShare programming into the open space of the library. In November 2013, they ran into a scheduling conflict for their Holiday Tech Fair, an annual event involving reps from Best Buy and other local stores and numerous devices and tech gifts to touch and explore. Traditionally hidden from view in a basement meeting room, Farley decided to hold the event on the main floor in the open space, thereby raising its visibility. This was a first for the library. Attendance was so high during the event day that one Best Buy rep called it “the Black Friday of libraries.” Even better, not one single patron in the building complained about noise or chaos.

Currently, the weekly Tech Coaching sessions are happening in the SkillShare space. Creative Crafting, book discussion groups and Qigong classes have also met there. There are plans to use the space to demo the library’s digital resources and as a teaser for teen programs.

“Staff have been pleased to move some existing library programs to this open and visible space.”

Unanticipated results and lessons learned

The space across from the circulation desk and near the entrance was well-chosen.

“The placement of the SkillShare space is terrific because anything happening there is visible to patrons picking up holds, browsing new titles or using self-check-out. If you enter the main floor, SkillShare is in your face. Patrons want to know what is happening! What is this program? For instance we have been offering tech coaching sessions for two years in a room, with a closed door. This allows the public to see the work that we do, to share that info with others, and to get involved as a participant or volunteer.”



Farley shared some important lessons learned in the process, especially the need to remain flexible in the implementation and open to shifts in direction.

“This project morphed considerably from its original inception. It was valuable to be able to step back and rethink, change, move forward, tweak and repeat. For us, it made sense to move from a grand scheme that in the long term would present challenges (both staffing and budget) that were not sustainable. Scaling back and reframing the project made sense. My advice would be to be flexible, be realistic.”

An unexpected staffing change impacted the programming planning, prompting Farley to rethink some early decisions and what she would do differently with hindsight.

“Starting over I would have included the entire programming committee in the SkillShare programming meetings. The small SkillShare group became a programming satellite. We needed the buy-in and the expertise of the full committee. This became particularly painful when the SkillShare programming lead accepted a new position and was no longer involved in the project. If the entire committee had been collaborating on SkillShare programming efforts, the loss of one staff member would have had less impact on the project.”

BPL has just moved someone on staff into the role of programming and managing community relations to bring people in to the space. The library and the community both look forward to seeing more transformation and engagement in the near future.

(after)
Bellingham Public Library
SkillShare in use



Nooksack Valley Heritage Center at Everson Library

About the Everson Branch of the Whatcom County Library System (WCLS)

Everson is a small community of about 3,000 residents located in Whatcom County, Washington, 15 miles northeast of Bellingham on the banks of the Nooksack River in the foothills of the Cascade Mountains. The library has a collection of 25,500 items and a staff of 12 plus two adjuncts.

The Everson/Nooksack communities have an enduring interest in local history. In 1976, members of the Everson Senior Center created a narrated slideshow of “Our Little Corner of the Valley.” Soon after the Everson branch was established in 1977, the Friends of the Library included a History Committee, which recorded local oral histories. The library displays photographs from the “Everson Historical Collection,” assembled by local volunteers in 1989 for the state centennial celebration.

The “Whatcom Memories” notebooks, full of photographs and family memorabilia, were collected in 1995. A 2012 Rural Heritage grant from the Washington State Library (WSL) enabled digitization of photographs from the Whatcom Memories project, now housed on the WSL website as Nooksack Valley Heritage.

Everson Branch Manager Eileen Shaw led the project development, with support from new Director Christine Perkins and Regan Robinson, Public Services Manager for WCLS. All quotations are from Shaw.



(before)
Everson Library
stacks

Responding to community needs

Community input about new uses of the library space was collected primarily through a survey, which was distributed online, through the mail and in person to reach as many residents as possible. The short survey of nine questions sought to determine what patrons valued about the Everson Branch.

Based on the 183 responses from respondents age 10 to over 70, there is much that the Everson Public Library is doing right:

- *Services rated most useful are all very traditional—collection checkout, computers/Internet, storytimes, lectures/events, knowledgeable staff*
- *The number-one most relevant and popular thing is the monthly history programming*
- *Asked about improvements, the overriding theme was “We need a bigger library!”*

Shaw did not feel that they received a “clear mandate” from the community survey responses.

“There was definite enthusiasm for doing ‘something’ in the library, but not clarity as to ‘what.’ We looked at the positive reaction to our long-standing focus on local history, and decided to build upon the groundwork of the past to create the Nooksack Valley Heritage Center within our library.”

Alignment and buy-in

In a small community, buy-in is especially important. To begin with, the survey validated that alignment with the Nooksack Valley pride in its history and heritage was strong. The tight-knit library staff were instrumental in determining the questions for the original survey and were invited to respond with comments and suggestions throughout the process. **The campaign to inform the community about the project probably reached every corner of town.**

In addition to the survey and feedback solicited by the Library Friends, the library distributed informational flyers, promoted the project at the town’s summer festival, and sent letters to business owners, clergy, nonprofits and educators.

They bought Facebook ads targeted to anyone with an Everson address. For those who visited the library, a large “What’s Happening Here” banner was hung in the newly vacated space to stimulate questions and fuel anticipation. The coming changes were explained at monthly history programs and feedback forms were provided for anonymous expression of reactions to the changes.

Reclaiming space

With floor area just over 4,000 square feet, the choices for space were limited. The natural inclination was to choose the reading area, which was already furnished with tables and chairs and no stacks. However, that proved to be a false start. Rather than lose that area to a new purpose, Shaw and her team refreshed their thinking and settled on the space in the center in direct line of sight from the circulation desk, an area that housed a “dwindling reference collection, soon-to-be-abandoned VHS and books on tape, and other things.”

It took some shuffling to clear the area. Once the area was cleared, there was room to design and to breathe new life into the space.

“We reduced collections that were housed on rolling units, made room for the two Internet stations in the center to join their three counterparts in the south section. We received permission from our IT department to relocate the printer station, which resulted in an improved Internet/printer configuration. Books on CD and music CDs were moved to the DVD aisle, so that became a dedicated audio-visual aisle. Adult Nonfiction was also severely weeded to accommodate the previous moves.”

Designing and planning

Soon after the decision was made to focus the new space on Nooksack Valley heritage, Shaw convened a meeting of 12–15 interested community members to discuss the possibilities and solicit their thoughts. Among those who showed up was Friends of the Library board member Reg Wilford, a new resident who had bought and begun to restore a century-old house in Everson. He brought to the project a budding passion for the local history and valuable expertise from his day job with a company that designs interactive exhibits for museums. His pro bono contributions were pivotal in directing design decisions and selecting fixtures and equipment. “He became the real visionary for the project.”

Partnerships

The Everson library's plans for its Nooksack Valley Heritage Center aroused the interest of related organizations in the community. The Northwest Washington Fair Foundation plans to build a Nooksack Valley Heritage Museum on the fairgrounds, and would like to partner with the library and the Lynden Museum. Shaw met with the curator of the Lynden Museum and discussed "a plethora of partnership possibilities."

Shaw also met with representatives from the Nooksack Valley School. They are compiling a Nooksack/Everson community directory for their Senior Project, and will be partnering with the Everson library, the two city councils and the Lions Club. They want to include a strong local history element and will feature the library's new Nooksack Valley Heritage Center.

Programming

Even before the Heritage Center was finished, patrons began taking advantage of the new possibilities.

"The Ancestry classes have full attendance and an enthusiastic reception. Patrons are sitting in the Center, browsing our expanded local history collection. The recording of oral histories has resumed, fueled by the enthusiasm for this project, and the knowledge that we'll have a place in-house where they will be housed and can be enjoyed."

The new Nooksack Valley Heritage Center opened officially to the community after the Friends' annual meeting on April 26, 2014. The 35 community members listened to Shaw and Wilford describe how the Center came together and their vision for its future.

"Step back in time, browse our collection of local history books and DVDs, interact with our history-focused touch screen work stations, explore Ancestry.com, bring in your artifacts and memorabilia to digitize, and record your own local history."



Unanticipated results and lessons learned

The Heritage Center is being received with enthusiasm from staff and the community. The Center is definitely capturing the interest of patrons who come to the library for other reasons.

Shaw has been amazed at the community members who volunteered to work on the project, and at the close friendships that developed as a result.

“We have a distinctly different new space, highly visible to all patrons, and dedicated to the exploration of local history. We have a sleeker, fresher collection. We’ve utilized the space that we have more efficiently.”

For Shaw and her team, the project took longer than anticipated; they had to come to terms with the reality that it could not be rushed because decision-making was sequential, often depending on the outcomes of the physical alterations. They made a significant change of direction in the location for the Center—a decision that required time to allow the better solution to percolate up to the surface.

“I tend to be a ‘plan-y’ person: make a list and check it off, hopefully in the right order. This project has played out much more spontaneously. As a result, creativity has flourished; ideas keep exploding and evolving. It continues to be an exhilarating ride. I guess the process itself has exemplified the key goal for the space we are creating: flexibility. Our ideas kept evolving, hopefully getting better!”

(after)
Nooksack Valley Heritage
Center in use



Appendix: Project Planning 101

Project Management Overview

Library staff and organizations are skilled at anticipating and adapting to changing community needs. In many ways, embarking on a space transformation is similar to any new library endeavor, in that library staff skills, effective use of resources, strategic decision making and communication are all integrated to manage diverse stakeholder expectations. Effective project planning and management skills strongly contributed to the success of the pilot libraries in realizing their visions of community space.

The *WebJunction Competency Index for the Library Field 2014* notes on pg. 33 that, “Effective project management involves managing people, resources and time. Leaders recognize that communication is essential throughout the project life cycle.”

Below is a brief overview of the key areas of *time* and *scope*, and how they may be considered throughout your library space planning, followed by:

- **Project Management Competencies**
- **Project Planning Worksheet**
- **Project Communications Worksheet**
- **Project Description Worksheet**
- **Space Inventory Worksheet.**

Time

The timeline that you set for your space transformation will be influenced by a number of factors. These may include:

- *Level of priority for space transformation in your library*
- *Other strategic initiatives underway at your library*
- *Availability of resources (staff, vendors, budget) to dedicate to the process.*

It is important to set targets for project timing that consider these factors.

Some people prefer to anticipate timing from start to finish, and others choose to build their timeline as they go. In our pilot work, we learned that **the approach for setting the timeline is not nearly as critical as simply maintaining a focus on timing objectives and dependencies**. Consider and experiment with these timeline parameters during your space transformation.

Project Timeline: Identify target start and end dates for completing an entire library space transformation with community input. For example, this may be a target to complete within a fiscal year, or by the end of a specific grant cycle.

Phase Timeline: There are three major components for space transformation articulated in this guide—*Create a Community Vision*, *Design Your Space* and *Sustain Your Space*. It may be useful for your library to set timelines for each of these phases independently, beginning with a timeline to *Create a Community Vision*, then establishing timelines to *Design Your Space* once you've obtained community input, and *Sustain Your Space* once services or programming begin to occur.

Deliverable Timeline: Perhaps your library has already decided what space you'd like to transform and how. In that instance, it may be useful to create a timeline around deliverables, or major activities that need to be completed for your transformation to take shape.

Whatever approach you consider, establishing a timeline is meant to be a straightforward process to help you manage your activities and resources, not a unique project in and of itself.

Scope

Put simply, your project scope frames the scale of your space planning effort, and helps establish parameters for making difficult decisions or trade-offs, which include but are not fully dependent upon considerations of timing or cost. Space-transformations can be done in a very cost-effective, budget-friendly manner, through partnerships, donations and creative design strategies discussed in this guide.



Some additional scope considerations to be deliberate about when launching your space transformation are noted below:

- *Why has our library chosen to embark on space transformation at this particular time?*
- *What impact do we hope to see when this work is complete? For our library? For our community?*
- *What information do we already have to guide our process? (Strategic plan, community data, etc.)*
- *What are the barriers or constraints that may impact our ability to execute this project? How will we monitor them?*
- *Who will lead this effort on behalf of our library? Who will support? Who has final say on major decisions?*

Keeping Track

Your approach to managing your space transformation process will likely be influenced by the complexity of your project scope, the criticality of the project to your library's goals and the culture of your library. Individuals and organizations take many diverse approaches to project or process management.

For example, some organizations utilize shared, online workspaces to manage collaborative projects. Others keep critical project or organizational documentation filed in hard or soft copy for anybody to access. Some teams assign or hire short-term project management support for critical endeavors, while others use whiteboards and Post-It notes to track responsibilities and deliverables. Whatever your approach is, remember that *function is more important than form*.

Choose tools that are realistic for your team to use and update, and continue to check-in with yourself and others to ensure that those contributing to your space planning efforts are getting the information they need, when they need it.

The *Project Planning Worksheet* included in this Appendix may be a useful starting tool. *The Six Views of Project Management Software summary* also provides excellent insight into some of the tools, applications and accessibility available to libraries to support project management capacity.

Space Planning At Your Library

Project Management Competencies

Effective project management involves managing people, resources and time. Leaders recognize that communication is essential throughout the project life cycle.

Employs sound project management principles and procedures in the planning and implementation of programs and services:

- Understands the basic principles and procedures of project management
- Defines outcomes and expectations based on user requirements and needs
- Develops support for projects that implement library goals and objectives
- Utilizes technology tools to increase project management efficiency
- Uses resources efficiently and manages effectively within budget limits.

Leads work teams with clear direction and effective communication:

- Conducts strategic selection of team members
- Develops a work plan with tasks, timeframes, milestones, resources and realistic deadlines
- Anticipates potential problems, sets controls and contingency plans, and responds effectively to resolve barriers
- Demonstrates flexibility, creativity and patience as needed throughout the life cycle of a project.

Monitors and evaluates projects and adapts as needed:

- Establishes processes for collecting, documenting and reporting data
- Monitors project progress and evaluates performance to ensure quality and quantity standards are met
- Fulfills legal or project requirements for compliance, recordkeeping and reporting
- Analyzes and identifies dissemination strategies, and reports project data and outcomes to stakeholders.

From the *WebJunction Competency Index for the Library Field 2014*.

Project Planning Worksheet

Use this worksheet to monitor/share key activities and next steps determined throughout your space transformation process. Be sure to document the date of your communications, so that you may review previous decisions and outcomes as necessary.

It is often useful to work through documentation like this in project meetings, but it can also be used as an email template as well.

Space Planning at Your Library						
Date:						
What	Who	Why	When		Available Resources	
			Target	Actual	Personnel	Budget

What: What is the activity that needs to be completed?

Who: Who is responsible for moving this activity forward and communicating with the appropriate stakeholders?

Why: What other project activities or outcomes depend on this activity, or, what does this activity achieve in support of project goals?

When: By when does this activity need to be completed? This is your target date. However, sometimes things change, so keeping track of the actual date of completion is useful for understanding timeline realities for future efforts.

Available Resources: Any team members, vendors or subject matter experts who may help inform the activity can be noted in the personnel column. Any expenses dedicated to the activity, if relevant, can be noted in the budget column.

Project Communications Worksheet

Use this worksheet to track the internal and external stakeholders you are communicating with as part of your space planning process. Specifically, be sure to identify who it is important to communicate with, at what times and via what mechanisms. Assign owners for regular communications.

The examples provided below are general by design. Who you communicate with and how will be dependent upon each community.

Space Planning at Your Library				
Date:				
Stakeholder	Frequency	Key Messages	Type of Communication	Who will Communicate
Library Board	Quarterly	Status update	In-person report	Library Director
Community members	Monthly	Opportunities to participate in process/visit space, etc.	e-newsletter	Deputy Director
Community partners	Weekly	Status update/next steps	Phone call	Outreach Coordinator
Library visitors	As needed	Clarification of what is happening in space as it changes	Signage	Program Manager



Project Description Worksheet

Use this worksheet to document, refine and execute your library community's vision for your revitalized space. This worksheet is useful for communicating your vision, in narrative format, with multiple stakeholders.

Library Details

[Consider including community information and needs, along with demographics and statistics that would make a case for increased community engagement. Be sure to look for data your library already has available (i.e. from strategic planning or grant proposals) before seeking new data.]

Project Selection Process

[This is where you will describe how you arrived at your decision of what to do with the space, and if/how that decision changes.]

Project Details

[Include your high-level objectives for your project, calling attention to primary goals, community engagement/impact, and anticipated necessary resources.]

Volunteers and Partnerships

[This topic is so important it has its own section! Spend some time thinking about how you can best leverage community volunteers and partners in your transformation.]

Space Versatility

[What are your expectations for the versatility of your space? Will it serve a singular function at all times, or can it be adaptable to serve multiple functions?]

Project Implementation Timeline

[Document a general overview month by month or quarter by quarter so your stakeholders are aware of your key milestones.]

Space Inventory Worksheet

Use this worksheet to verify understanding of what is already available in your space, and consider how it may be modified, replaced or removed to realize your community's vision for the space. You will then be able to make informed decisions to realize your transformation.

Square Footage of Space _____

Space Planning at Your Library			
Space Element	Current Status	Desired Status	Modify/Replace/Remove
Lighting	Too dim	Good lighting for project based work	Need to either upgrade bulbs or add additional lighting
Flooring			
Power Outlets			
Broadband/WiFi			
Table(s)			
Chair(s)			
Shelving			
Current materials			
Other			



“...the process itself has exemplified the key goal for the space we are creating: flexibility.”

– Eileen Shaw, Everson Branch Manager

Resources to Support Your Library Transformation

American Library Association *Library Fact Sheet 15 Weeding Bibliography*:

<http://www.ala.org/tools/libfactsheets/alalibraryfactsheet15>

Association for Rural and Small Libraries *DeClutter Your Collection* slides:

<http://arsl.info/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/DeClutter.pdf>

Laura S. Quinn *Six Views of Project-Management Software* article:

http://webjunction.org/documents/webjunction/Six_Views_of_Project_045_Management_Software.html

Library Journal *Library by Design* section:

http://lj.libraryjournal.com/category/buildings/lbd/#_

Project for Public Spaces *Eleven Principles for Creating Great Community Places* article:

<http://www.pps.org/reference/11steps/>

Sheena Iyengar *How to Make Choosing Easier* presentation:

https://www.ted.com/talks/sheena_iyengar_choosing_what_to_choose

Traci Lesneski *10 Steps to a Better Library Interior: Tips that Don't Have to Cost a Lot* article:

<http://lj.libraryjournal.com/2011/08/buildings/10-steps-to-a-better-library-interior-tips-that-dont-have-to-cost-a-lot-library-by-design/>

WebJunction *Competency Index for the Library Field 2014* guide:

http://www.webjunction.org/documents/webjunction/Competency_Index_for_the_Library_Field.html

WebJunction *Flexible Spaces, Flexible Futures* webinar and article:

<http://webjunction.org/events/webjunction/flexible-spaces-flexible-futures.html>

<http://webjunction.org/news/webjunction/space-is-flexible.html>

WebJunction *Space Planning* section:

<http://webjunction.org/explore-topics/space-planning.html>

WebJunction *Transforming Library Space for Community Engagement* webinar and article:

<http://webjunction.org/events/webjunction/transforming-library-space-for-community-engagement.html>

<http://webjunction.org/news/webjunction/transforming-library-space-for-community-engagement.html>



WebJunction's vision is to be the place where the library profession gathers to build the knowledge, skills and support we need to power relevant, vibrant libraries. Our mission is to promote learning for all library staff by providing open, affordable online learning communities.



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