

EDISON TOWNSHIP FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY STRATEGIC PLAN 2017 - 2019

INTRODUCTION

In 2016, the Edison Township Free Public Library embarked on a strategic planning process to evaluate and update the last strategic plan (2007 – 2010). The design of the planning process focused on assisting the Library Board and Staff in identifying strengths and weaknesses while developing priorities for library service within Edison.

The Edison Township Free Public Library consists of a Main Library, the North Edison Branch, the Clara Barton Branch and a bookmobile. The Library has a Foundation that raises funds to support projects important to the Library and the services it provides to Edison residents.

Statement from the Board of Trustees

The Edison Township Free Public Library Trustees enthusiastically thank everyone who participated in the creation of this strategic plan, especially the library staff who worked tirelessly to clarify library-related information and helped establish goals. These dynamic goals will serve to guide the Board and staff in meeting the evolving library needs of the community.

Board of Trustees

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Approved by the Library Board of Trustees, May 17, 2017

CURRENT MISSION

The Edison Township Free Public Library is the first place to go for cultural, intellectual and leisure learning which will enrich our community and improve the quality of life in Edison.

VISION

The Edison Township Free Public Library will become the “crossroads” of Edison. We will be a modern 21st Century community information depot that connects the lives of all Edison residents and library users through a shared library experience.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

The Edison Township Free Public Library will:

- Be a center of community engagement and community and local government information.
- Support and encourage all types of literacy, especially English language literacy, early childhood literacy, information literacy and technology literacy.
- Provide expanding collections of materials, in all formats, to meet the educational, recreational and cultural needs of all Edison residents.

The Edison Township Free Public Library serves a large, diverse community through multiple service outlets with varied services and programs. This strategic plan affords the opportunity to recommit to our traditional library activities that serve our community well and to develop strategic directions for growth both within those traditional services and by identifying new opportunities for service to the community.

After reviewing all the data from library usage, the community survey, the SWOT analysis, research into community and library trends, and focus group meeting with community leaders, the planning committee identified the above strategic directions for the library. Goals and activities for the strategic plan are built around these strategic directions and will be used to guide the Board and library staff in identifying and pursuing other goals and activities as the plan moves forward over the next several years.

GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES STATEMENTS

The planning committee developed four strategic goals in the areas of community engagement, community awareness, core services, and facilities. Objectives and activities for each goal were developed with staff input and approved by the planning committee. Activities identified within each objective will be reported on to the Board and updated, revised, or changed as circumstances require so that this strategic plan is an evolving plan, easily adapted to the changes that occur from year to year.

Goal 1 – Community Engagement

Our library will become a central part of the Edison Township community through active community engagement.

Objectives and Activities for 2017/2018

- **Identify and adapt models of community engagement to Edison Township**
 1. Research what other libraries are doing with community engagement and identify strategies to try in Edison.
 2. Pursue funding (for example, from the NJ Council on the Humanities Innovations Program or LibraryLinkNJ) to support training in community engagement planning.
 3. Create a community engagement team to develop a unified community engagement outreach strategy across all library departments and buildings.
 4. Update and expand collaboration partnerships within the community.

- **Assure all library staff understand and are involved in community engagement**
 1. Conduct staff meeting to familiarize staff with community engagement plan.
 2. Train staff on how to implement community engagement plan.
 3. Create a staff community engagement calendar.
 4. Recognize staff participation.
 5. Continue ongoing customer service training.

- **Convene community conversations around topics of interest to our residents**
 1. Reach out to all types of community organizations to learn about their issues, challenges, etc.
 2. Develop ways in which the library can participate in addressing those issues.
 3. Follow up with continued communication.
 4. Reach out to Edison Municipal Government to help facilitate community awareness of local issues.

Goal 2 – Community Awareness

Our community will discover how much we have to offer all Edison residents through library resources, programming and outreach.

Objectives and Activities for 2017/2018

- **Implement a marketing and public relations plan for the library**
 1. Develop a brand for the library.
 2. Develop updated mission and vision statements.
 3. Develop a social media plan that focuses on ways to bring more community engagement to the library's social media presence.

- **Develop an Outreach Plan that integrates existing activities in each library location**
 1. Inventory existing activities for each location.
 2. Identify gaps or overlaps in existing activities.

- **Update the library's program planning process to assure programming is focused on community needs**
 1. Consult user survey responses to develop programming calendars for Adult, Children's and Young Adult Programming.
 2. Review and revise promotional efforts to assure the community is learning about programming opportunities at the library.
 3. Gather data at each program regarding how attendees heard about the program.
 4. Add a marketing specialist to the library staff.
 5. Develop an introduction to use at programs to promote other library activities and services.

Goal 3 -- Core Services

Our library will provide all residents with the resources, materials, and services they need to fulfill their educational, cultural and leisure needs.

Objectives and Activities for 2017/2018

- **Update Collection Development Policy**
 1. Identify specific areas of nonfiction to be updated.
 2. Expand digital collection to include more e-books.
 3. Enlarge existing World language collection and conduct surveys to determine other languages that should be added to the collection.
 4. Identify annual collection development priorities.

- **Assure Edison Township Free Public Library is offering the most current and emerging technologies**

1. Training – Conduct classes for patrons and staff on using computers, devices, and databases. Purchase more laptops for computer lab.
2. Makerspace – Add mobile Makerspaces for Main Library and Clara Barton.
3. STEM/STEAM – Identify outside trainers to conduct these classes.

- **Collection Management**

1. Reduce wait time for new materials.
2. Develop an inventory schedule and continue current weeding practices.
3. Review current collection management practices.
4. Review impact of circulation policies including fines and fees. Identify and recommend any necessary changes.

Goal 4 – Facilities

Our library offers residents safe, comfortable, inviting, and technologically up-to-date facilities.

Objectives and Activities for 2017/2018

- **Provide a Safe Environment**

1. Develop emergency evacuation plans in cooperation with the Edison Fire Department and train staff on how to use them.
2. Continue employing Security Guards at Main Library and North Edison during the school year.
3. Conduct appropriate safety and first aid training for staff.
4. Review existing personnel, facilities and/or library emergency plans and procedures to assure adequate coverage of matters concerning staff and patron safety and security.

- **Assure that all library facilities are up to date and well-maintained**

1. Establish 3 to 5 year plans identifying Capital needs for each building.

2. Review space usage in each building and identify alternative ways to use space that better serves Edison residents.
3. Develop 3-5 year technology improvement plan and include it in the budget.

APPENDIX A Process and Community Background

Participants

The strategic planning committee included the following participants:

Strategic Planning Committee

Eileen M. Palmer - Facilitator, Executive Director of Libraries of Middlesex
Automation Consortium (LMxAC)

Judith Mansbach - Library Director

Evan T. Davis - Assistant Director

Sharon Giniger - Branch Head, Clara Barton Library

Kathi Johnson - Library Foundation Board Member

Lonnie Johnson, Gabriel Ramos, Debra Truppo - Library Staff

Patricia Massey - Library Trustee

Cheryl O'Connor - Community Member

Process

The planning process included a review of current library usage, library trends, community needs and community trends. In addition to the research conducted by the committee, a survey of residents of Edison was completed in the fall of 2016. The Committee also discussed the Library's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. From all of the data collected we were able to isolate specific areas of concentration for the Library's future. These areas were further developed into goals and action statements. The action statements are deliverable activities that the Library commits to each year. The Board and Staff will review progress annually and identify the action statements for the coming year. In this way the plan will be a living document, guiding the Board and Staff with regular review and revision as needed.

Edison Community Background

Edison is an historic New Jersey community dating back to pre-revolutionary times. Its rich history includes Native American settlements, British and Continental soldiers and battles during war time. But Edison came into its own after the introduction of the railroad brought inventor Thomas Edison and his Menlo Park laboratories. Today Edison is one of the largest and most diverse communities in New Jersey. With a total population just over 100,000, the median age of its residents is 38. 23% of residents are under the age of 18 and 13% are over 65. Ethnicities represented in Edison are Caucasian (44%), Asian (43%), Hispanic (8%) and African American (7%). 20% of the population over 5 years old have limited English proficiency. About 6% of the population live below the poverty line. Edison is largely built out with any remaining open space dedicated to parks, wetlands and community usage.

Edison Community Trends

The Edison of today is largely a commuter community with many residents working outside the Township and, seemingly, with less and less unrestricted time. This impacts the way the community can interact with the library and calls on the library to develop service responses to meet changing community needs.

The school district eliminated school library media specialists in all eleven elementary schools years ago. The current superintendent has updated all of the elementary school libraries in recent years to include computers and the facilities are now staffed by library aides. The two high school and four middle school libraries are staffed by certified school library media specialists. Parents and students increasingly rely on technology to communicate with the schools. There are also fewer opportunities for library staff to interact with schools in traditional ways. With the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in December 2015, libraries and schools across the country are re-examining and reimagining ways to connect parents, teachers and librarians to assure our students are developing the information, digital, and media literacy skills they will need.

Models of library service focusing on building community engagement are seeing success around the country and offer the Edison Township Free Public Library a real opportunity to expand the services it provides. Edison spans over 30 square miles and surrounds the borough of Metuchen. This unusual geography is a challenge and as a result, the library system serves its widespread clientele through three buildings and a bookmobile.

Edison Township Free Public Library

The Edison Township Free Public Library is an outgrowth of the Raritan Township Free Public Library Association that first met in 1926. In 1927, it boasted 246 books. In the election of November 1928, voters approved its recognition as a municipal library.

The library was first housed in humble surroundings at the corner of Woodbridge Avenue and Thomasine Street in the Piscatawaytown neighborhood. It has survived fire and numerous relocations - the corner of Woodbridge Avenue and Myrtle Street in 1931, the second floor of the former municipal building at the corner of Woodbridge and Plainfield Avenues in 1938, and 238 Plainfield Avenue (south of the present day Burger King), in 1959. The present Main Library, at 340 Plainfield Avenue (near the Edison train station), was built in 1965. In 1987, the building was expanded, and the Bookmobile garage and a large meeting room were added.

Early in the library's history, service was expanded to other parts of the township. In 1932, service was extended to the Clara Barton and Oak Tree Firehouses and in 1937, to the Henry Street Firehouse in Oak Tree and to Menlo Park.

In 1962, library facilities were available at the John Adams Middle School on New Dover Road, and later transferred to the North Edison Branch Library when it opened in 1971. The branch, located at 777 Grove Avenue, has been expanded twice - in 1979 and 1992. A monument on the north side of the building is dedicated to the exempt firemen of Edison. In September 1999, an eight-foot high, red cedar Peace Pole displaying the words "May Peace Prevail On Earth" in eight languages was dedicated by the members of Junior Girl Scout Troop 1045.

The Clara Barton Branch Library began in the former Chapel of St. Stephen's Evangelical Lutheran Church at 76 Pleasant Avenue. The present building, at the corner of Pleasant and Hoover Avenues, opened its doors in late 2002.

In 1973, the Edison Bookmobile took to the road. This "library on wheels" visits schools, nursing homes, day care facilities, apartment complexes and neighborhoods throughout Edison, bringing library services to township residents. The popular Bookmobile can also be seen at special events, such as Edison Family Day and the Fall Festival of Fireworks.

Appendix B Library Usage, Funding, Services and Trends

Library Usage and Funding

38% of Edison residents are library card holders, which is slightly higher than the area average of 32%. Annual circulation of both physical and electronic library materials has dropped over the last several years. Like many libraries in New Jersey and in the United States, this is likely attributable to significant declines in funding over the last seven years or so.

During the planning process the Library was compared to a cohort group of eight other libraries in New Jersey serving similar populations (Comparisons were made using annual report data for 2013 (the latest data available). Edison's operating expenditures per capita were \$39.22, lower than the cohort average of \$49.73. Edison's circulation of 609,112 represents per capita circulation of 6.09, higher than the cohort group's average of 5.8. Edison's library visits per capita also compared favorably with the average of its cohort group (5.61 for Edison; 4.8 for the group average).

While usage (defined here by circulation and the number of library users) across the library system has declined, the impact of the decline varies by

library outlet in Edison. North Edison and the Bookmobile both have seen increased usage. The Main Library's usage has remained flat and usage at the Clara Barton Branch has decreased.

Funding for Edison Township Free Public Library has declined by more than \$1 million over the last several years. This led to reduced hours, loss of staff, furlough days and reduced book budgets. Now that the declines have started to level off the Library must determine the priorities for library services in the future. This future will likely be built on the current level of library funding. The Library has been successful in pursuing grants for lighting, a new bookmobile, and replacement HVAC units but building needs persist and delayed maintenance may no longer be delayed.

Children and Young Adult Programming & Services

The Library has an active Children's Services Program which includes:

Baby Lapsit Program for infants 9-23 months of age

Family Story Programs for 1-11 years of age

Very Ready Reading Early Literacy Program for 2-3 years of age

Preschool Storyhour Program for 3-6 years of age.

School aged programs for 6 - 9 years of age.

Sign Language program for preschool children

Story program for children with special needs such as Autism

Family Book Bingo 2-3x per year

Craft fairs held 2-3x per year

Summer Reading

School Visits

Young Adult Services include:

Dedicated physical section for the YA collection

Access to desktop computers, printers, databases and e-books

Resources for College Planning

SAT/ACT/PSAT Practice tests

Seminars by professionals who discuss College planning, Financial Aid, Scholarships, College Essay practice and help with college applications

Community service hours are earned for participating in various activities at library

Summer Reading Program

Teen Programming: Poetry programs, Book club, crafts, parties, etc.

Library Outreach Services

Libraries demonstrate their value to their community by responding to issues and identifying trends that impact the community through outreach library services. The Edison Township Free Public Library outreach library services are varied and plentiful.

New forms of programming such as MakerSpaces reflect the changing world. The Edison MakerSpace located at North Edison Township Free Public Library includes an iMac, Makerbot 3D Printer, a workbench stocked

with hand tools and a quilting sewing machine. Arduino kits and Raspberry Pi kits are provided to allow patrons to explore and design items from display signs, bracelets and robots. MakerSpaces are designed for the community to explore and invent.

Edison Bookmobile provides outreach library services to a cross section of the population including preschoolers, school age children, special children, adults, senior citizens, nursing home residents, and adult day care center patrons. Elderly residents and immigrants, often do not drive and/or own a car, would be without library services if not for the Edison Bookmobile stops in their neighborhood. Programs include an annual summer reading program, story hours at preschools, school visits and programs at an adult day care center. The Bookmobile tries to be involved in the community by participating at Family Day, the Fall Festival and the Memorial Day Parade during the year.

Computer classes are taught at all three libraries by Reference Librarians. Classes include Computer Basics, Internet for Beginners, Mouse Skills, Word, Excel, and PowerPoint, Job Searching, Resume Writing, and Acing the Job Interview. One on one sessions are scheduled by a Reference Librarian on request for Resume Writing and Job Counseling. The intent is by reaching out to the community to teach these computer classes, we will attract more patrons to utilize our library services.

The Edison Township Free Public Library in cooperation with Literacy New Jersey-Middlesex County Programs provides free ESL conversation classes taught by volunteer teachers.

The Reference Librarians and the YA Librarian visited the middle schools to reach out to the teachers and students. The students were given Chromebooks for their school work. The Reference Librarians in cooperation with the administrators and teachers decided to hold Chromebook Classes at the library to teach parents how to use them. The

Edison School System donated the Chromebooks to the Edison Township Free Public Library to support training for both students and parents.

Children's Librarians visit the elementary schools twice a year. The Children's Librarians have a program at each elementary school for the kindergarteners in September for National Library Card Sign-Up Month. All second grade classes receive a visit with a program to introduce the new theme for the Summer Reading Program in June. Other school visits by librarians are made throughout the school year upon request by teachers.

Outreach Services Through Partnerships

Edison Township Free Public Library Foundation began in 2009 to help raise funds through donations and charitable events to support free programs and services offered at the Edison Township Free Public Library in order to enable the library to meet the community's needs. One of the outstanding and popular programs was the Special Exhibit on Lincoln: "Lincoln: The Constitution and the Civil War." Dr. Louis Masur, Distinguished Professor of American Studies at Rutgers University, delivered the opening lecture on the challenges facing President Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War.

The Friends of the Edison Township Free Public Library is struggling to survive. The previous president was unable to continue in his role. Unfortunately, volunteers have been difficult to attract. At this time the future of the Friends group is unclear.

The Director of the Edison Township Free Public Library has reached out to the community by joining the Edison Rotary Club. This keeps the library abreast of what is going on with people in other vocations, businesses and civic organizations and informs Rotary members about services and activities of the library.

Appendix C Community Survey and SWOT Analysis

Community Survey

The strategic planning committee developed a survey to measure community satisfaction with library services and to seek input from the community on future library services. 1,193 people responded to the survey, far exceeding the 261 people who participated in surveys and/or focus group sessions during the last strategic planning process in 2007. This large response was due to the efforts of the staff to go out into the community with the survey and the ease of use of the survey methodology via the Internet. 99% of the respondents were from Edison and 16% filled out the survey on paper rather than online.

74% of survey respondents were between the ages of 30 to 49 which, while explainable through demographics of existing library patrons, means that other age groups are under-represented.

Survey respondents were asked to identify a specific branch or the bookmobile as their primary library. 47% identified the North Edison Branch, 34% identified the Main Library, 10% identified the Clara Barton Branch, 5% the Bookmobile and 4% indicated they did not use the library. 65% of respondents used the Edison Township Free Public Library at least once in the last month, and 28% identify themselves as occasional library users.

While overall satisfaction with the services provided by the Library is high, survey respondents pointed out some areas for improvement. Respondents' lack of awareness of some basic library services was concerning and certainly identifies an area for staff focus in the new strategic plan.

Like many libraries in the US and in New Jersey, library use in Edison is still strongly based on the traditional model of the library as book depository. 80% of people who used the library did so to borrow books or other

materials. Children's services are used by 40% of respondents and digital content services by 35%. These numbers are positive for today and hopeful for the future. Traditional library services are clearly still in demand today. Libraries that expand to offer newer services will often be able to reach new library users. There is evidence in the survey that the Edison Township Free Public Library is beginning to reach users through digital content and innovative technology such as its North Edison makerspace.

When asked to comment on what they value most from the library, the clear answers are books and children's services. When asked about new ways to serve the community the most common words in the responses were 'more' and 'increased'. Whether it is books, services, staff, hours or digital content, Edison's library patrons want more. Some residents also see a role for the library in community engagement, such as a resident who responded that they would like the library to be "A place of intellectual exchange of ideas between children, youth, and adults." Many of the trends in library service identified during the planning committee's research were also mentioned by survey respondents – more digital content, improved use of space, additional foreign language materials and more ambitious programming.

The most striking responses to many questions is the unfamiliarity even regular library users have with the Library's services. Almost 60% have never, or only occasionally, used the website. 70% did not know the Library offered adult and young adult programming. While children's programming saw a slight improvement, still some 43% of respondents were unaware of this fundamental library service. Respondents clearly have a high level of satisfaction with the services they use and are aware of – this creates a tremendous opportunity to better serve existing users and bring in new library users that the strategic planning process can address.

Other themes common throughout the comments in the survey were a desire for more hours, a sense that the Main Library looks old or 'tired' and a sense, particularly among non-library users that using the library is time consuming and less necessary in the age of the Internet. These comments also represent opportunities for the Library to address these issues through implementation of the strategic plan. Library users from Clara Barton still feel concern about the future of their branch and express great loyalty to it and its staff. Lastly, there were some negative comments about the fine and fee structure (the complexity and the differences with other neighboring libraries mostly) as well as some indications that more attention should be paid to customer service.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT)

The Strategic Planning Committee also undertook an examination of the Library's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT). A SWOT analysis is an opportunity for review of the Library's internal and external factors that will impact its ability to achieve any goals adopted in the strategic plan. Without a strong understanding of these internal (strengths and weaknesses) and external (opportunities and threats) the Library cannot develop a realistic but aspirational strategic plan.

In completing the SWOT analysis committee members were asked to focus on specific areas of collections, staff, facilities, technology and partnerships/other. The complete SWOT chart is attached to this plan. This process brought to light some major issues and opportunities for the library. For example, the collection was viewed by committee members as a strength but the ability to process materials and get them to patrons quickly was acknowledged as a weakness. Having multiple facilities is a strength in a large township like Edison but the cost of maintaining and securing these facilities limits the Library's ability to grow in collection or programmatic areas. The Library has kept up with technology but the pace of change and need for growing technological expertise has created additional stresses for the staff and public. The Library has strong

partnerships with other libraries and its own Foundation but believes there are many undiscovered partners in the community. The Library also identifies key past partners, especially the schools, as no longer as viable and seeks to re-energize such relationships.

Each of the service and community elements identified through the SWOT analysis should be incorporated into the goals and action statements developed in this strategic plan.

Appendix D – Community Focus Groups

At the request of the Board, the planning committee sponsored three focus group sessions to provide residents of Edison with additional opportunities to participate in the planning process. Sessions were facilitated by planning consultant Eileen M. Palmer based on a model developed by facilitator Joanne Roukens. The input received during these sessions is summarized below and has been incorporated into the draft strategic plan. It should be noted that, while the attendance was low at these sessions, the input received was consistent with input received from the community survey.

Problems Facing Edison:

- Taxes are high
- School population is increasing each year; Schools are filled to capacity; lack of school library media specialists in the elementary schools
- Diversity has its issues and is complicated.
- Accessibility of the community; Edison is a large community; congestion-traffic;
- Not enough communication from the Township; lack of transparency on the Township website; residents are not connected to the community
- Zoning, housing and development concerns
- Children use social media too much and don't play outside. Maybe the Library can provide hiking or field trips.
- Intergeneration families living together lead to bigger homes and more strain on the community

Success stories in Edison:

- Easy access to everything; location is good;
- Educating children is valued; education system is well regarded.
- Diversity;
- Involved parents; parents bring children to the Library as a place to learn; the location attracts a lot of residents;
- Great shopping; good ethnic food shopping;
- Roosevelt Park and Plays in the Park; The Thomas Edison Tower and Museum; Ice Skating at Roosevelt Park
- Many jobs in the Township.
- It is a safe community. People grow up in Edison and wish to remain as adults.

What are Edison's Goals

- Big community center to teach children and keep them out of trouble or several community centers (neighborhood centers). Need more recreational programs. More engagement of school age children and adults in the form of free concerts.
- The Township needs a unique identity. It needs a more unified community that highlights each area of the town. Route 27 area should be enhanced. There should be increased pride in Edison.

How can the Library help the community achieve its goals:

- Access for more groups to be able to meet in the Library;
- Help celebrate other cultures/holidays.
- Programs for parents and children;
- Cultural programming including the American culture;
- Connect with the schools and find out what the students are reading and supplement the schools with materials;
- Hold Township meetings at all the Branches.
- Offer book talks on the best new books and encourage patrons to read like One Book, One Town.
- Hire a Community Engagement Librarian;
- Provide concerts, lectures at the Library;

- Have craft programs for families similar to ones at the Zimmerli Museum in New Brunswick.
- Consider a program with a Councilperson for informal discussions about government and local issues;
- Library should get minutes of the Township Council and post them.
- Address changing population in Clara Barton due to new construction