

## Strategic Plan Priority Actions

### 2012-13: Year One: Library Operations

1. Commit to continued partnership with the Ventura County Library System
2. Appoint Strategic Plan Work Group
3. Create a plan to establish an "express library" presence on the Eastside
4. Prioritize continuation of Westside library branch with dedicated funding source
5. Use available trust funds to improve Foster and Avenue branches and services
6. Refocus to adopt a more patron-centric work focus
7. Expand volunteer base
8. Rethink how programming can be provided to the community
9. Reconfigure opening hours to accommodate residents
10. Incorporate a permanent Eastside library into the City's Capital Improvement Program

### 2013-14: Year Two: Community Engagement

1. Introduce new model of library service at temporary Eastside location
2. Continue redesign of interior and exterior of Foster Library
3. Expand programs for all users
4. Build a virtual branch presence
5. Annual community workshops

### 2014-15: Year Three: Articulating the Need

1. Create a marketing campaign to support enhanced library services

2. Reallocate existing funds to acquire fresh materials
3. Finalize redesign of EP Foster and Avenue branches
4. Establish annual user survey
5. Collaborate with community partners, including schools
6. Create a funding plan

### 2015-16: Year Four: Defining Library Excellence

1. Hold community forums
2. Continue to develop community partnerships
3. Identify Capital Campaign support group
4. Promote library services through social media
5. Increase classes and online events for seniors and teens

### 2016-17: Year Five: Bricks and Mortar

1. Finalize plans for proposed facility on East End
2. Roll out Capital Campaign
3. Provide ongoing fresh collections and services.

**View the entire document of this plan at [www.cityofventura.net/libraries](http://www.cityofventura.net/libraries).**

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# Vision for the Future

## Library Strategic Plan

– May 2012 –



CITY OF  
**VENTURA**  
COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS  
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## Executive Summary

America's public libraries, which number over 16,000 facilities, will face many challenges in the next five years. Trends are evolving, public expectations are increasing, and funding is shrinking: all of this creates a "perfect storm" for libraries as they struggle to fulfill both the requirements and desires of the public they serve.



Perhaps most challenging, many members of the public question the very nature of libraries as anachronistic and unnecessary in this age of digital information. But the facts show that this is not the case: libraries play a vital role in providing access to information for all sectors of the population, particularly for those with no other options. Libraries are usually a community's only location that provides free access to computers, along with professional help and education, resources and material, homework assistance, and a huge variety of other services to everyone across all racial, income, gender, age, and other socio-economic spectra.

Libraries also have a demonstrable economic impact on their communities: libraries support start-up businesses and are one of the vital elements of a community's assets – along with a strong school system, well-maintained parks, a robust cultural scene, and a safe community – that attract businesses looking to relocate. However, libraries continue to be a target for municipal budget cuts: U.S. mayors reported in November that hours, staff, or services at local libraries was the second most prevalent area recommended for budget reductions, second only to maintenance and services at public parks and gardens.

The challenges facing libraries in the City of Ventura are no different. Ventura residents have high expectations for library services – an auspicious sign, since it shows

that they have been receiving a high level of service for years, which has established their expectation set point at a high mark. Recently, Venturans' dissatisfaction with their libraries has grown – again, a national or at least regional trend, evidenced by the spate of nearby communities (Santa Clarita, Camarillo, perhaps Simi Valley) that have recently opted to leave their public library systems and instead contract with private providers.

Through a year-long strategic planning process that included vigorous, comprehensive and often very passionate conversations about the future of public library services in the City, Ventura residents have made their goals clear: they want libraries that are warm, welcoming places – they want libraries close to their home – they want a multitude of collections and programs – they want advanced technology – and they want a place that will serve all ages.

But how can the City provide all that with the limited resources available? Revenue directed to the library through property tax assessments is very low: \$17 per capita. Although the City of Ventura supplements that income with \$90,000 of Community Development Block Grant funding each year, and the County Library System provides an additional \$350,000 in funding, bringing per capita spending in Ventura up to almost \$24, that is still far lower than the national average of \$48, or even the state average of \$33 per capita. This comparison becomes even more glaring when Ventura is compared to a nearby community: Ventura's annual spending amounts to only 38% of the Thousand Oaks library budget.

It is clear that in order to provide Ventura residents with the priority services they want, the current picture of the traditional library will have to change.

Most people have one of two visions of a "traditional" library in their heads. It might be an authoritarian marble monolith of a building filled with row upon row of imposing leather-bound volumes, where studious scholars research quietly at long wooden tables and the stacks are patrolled by intimidatingly knowledgeable staff. Or conversely, it may be a small building just off the village square where smiling librarians greet giggling children by name as they come for story hour, neighborhood residents come in and select from a plentiful collection of both the latest best-sellers and dearly beloved favorite books, and elderly patrons snooze behind newspapers until it's time for them to amble along home for lunch.

Obviously, libraries today don't fit perfectly into these iconic packages. What is less obvious is that these broad characterizations of a "typical" library are relatively recent and are only a blip in the evolution of libraries in our nation. The roots of the library system diverge significantly from these pictures. Back in the 18th century, Ben Franklin founded America's first lending library: not a haven for bookworms, but a place that provided workingmen access to self education at a time when schooling beyond the age of ten was reserved for the upper class. Famously, it lent out books – then considered imported luxury goods. Nearly forgotten is the fact that it also lent out scientific and practical tools like telescopes and microscopes.

Libraries have always evolved with the times. So what does a library look like in the 21st century? It probably has less to do with a "collection" and more to do with a "connection." If we

*"Libraries will get you through times with no money better than money will get you through times of no libraries."*

– Anne Herbert

can let go of our picture of what libraries have meant to us in the past, a new model may evolve – one that we can create here in Ventura, pay for with currently available resources, and expand incrementally as other funding sources emerge.

This strategic plan lays out a plan to address Ventura's library priorities, and articulates a means by which to achieve a new paradigm that will serve to bring residents together in the library of the future. The plan addresses priorities and findings in three key areas – Facilities, Collections and Services, and Technology – and provides an overview of funding requirements and options. The funding recommendations are specifically formulated in light of the current economic situation, with little start-up money required and incremental resource growth to support the long-term community vision.

The recommendations outlined in this plan, to be implemented over a five-year period, direct sustained action on three distinct fronts – at the Foster Library, at the Avenue Library, and on the Eastside – in order to achieve three goals: sustainable library service downtown and on the Westside, a new model of library service on the Eastside, and increased use of the library system as a whole.

