



Acton Library Draft Strategic Plan, 2021-2024

September 24, 2021

“If the people in the community feel happy, healthy, safe, and smart then the library is doing a great job.”

--Pam Sandlian Smith,

Former President of the Public Library Association

Planning Process

Input from over 500 members of the Old Saybrook community through:

- 4 focus groups, 34 participants
- 355 took the online survey and 170 took again
- 7 key informant interviews

Input from Advisory Council and staff:

- Advisory Council (5) and staff meetings (2)
- Staff survey
- Interviews with 5 key staff
- Work Group (4 meetings)

Big issues identified

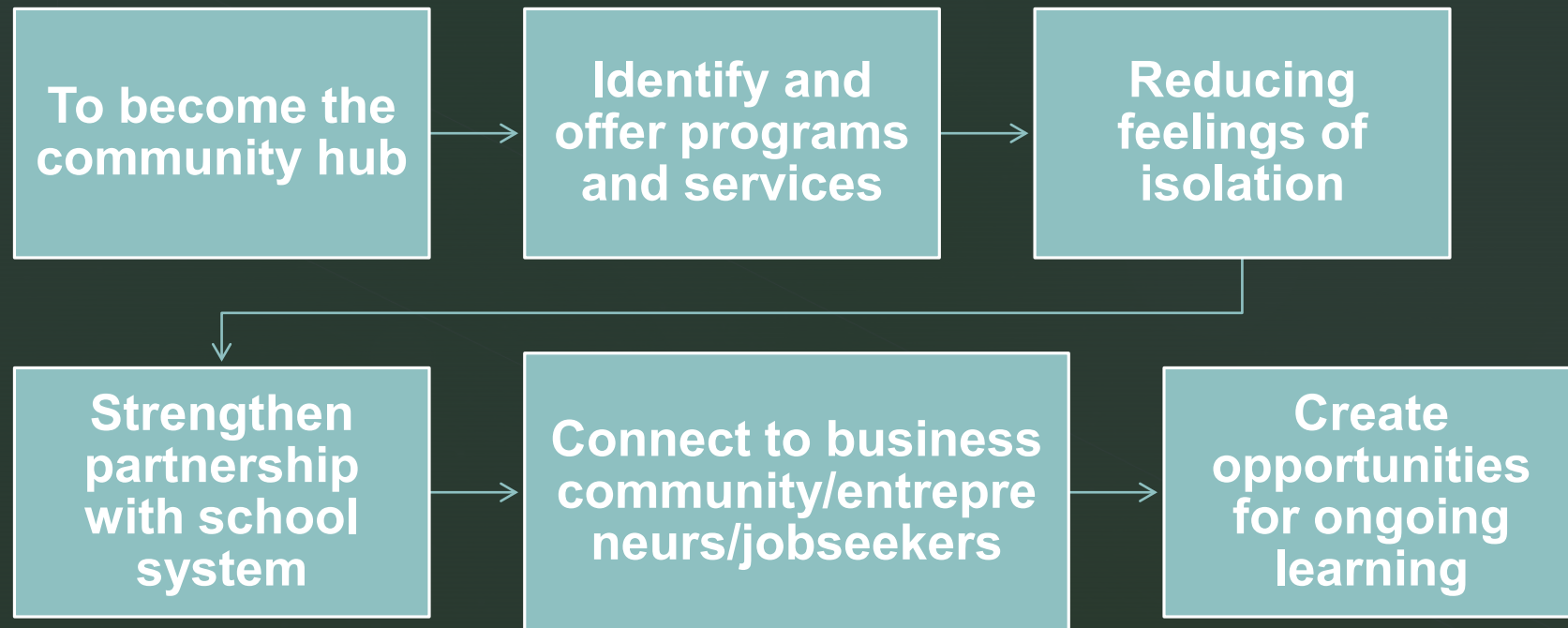
Emergence of collaboration between sectors.

The seasonal nature of the community and associated impact on economic well-being.

Changing demographics and generational/economic divides.

A desire for a more physically and interpersonally connected community

Identified opportunities



What Covid taught you

- Change is not an option—it is urgent
- The more flexible the organization, the more prepared to handle what comes next
- Outside space is critical to develop

The constant
question:

“Where’s the
Library in this?”

Community vision

*We want to create a vibrant community with accessible and inclusive public spaces where all people, regardless of status and circumstance, **can meaningfully connect through a variety of methods.***

*We face the challenge of engaging all voices as we chart our path forward into an uncertain future, with limitations in our local government, shifts in how residents spend their time and resources, **and an acknowledgement that there are residents who face barriers to meeting their basic needs.***

*We want to create a culture that inspires and encourages all residents and stakeholders to invest time, resources, and energy to build a community where all feel welcome and **proud to be a part of Old Saybrook, including its natural beauty.***

Proposed Mission Statement

To build a welcoming community with free and open access to information and experiences that engage the imagination, inspire learning, and foster the exchange of ideas.

► Foundational Strategies

Staff. It is common to see new service delivery goals added to an existing staff structure. Optimally, in order to meet the goals outlined below, a first step is to reexamine the staffing structure so that it supports the goals. This can and should be done in a way that works collaboratively to understand tasks that do not further the goals and then shifts responsibilities to those activities that do. If this is not done, it can overwhelm an organization.

Foundational Strategies

▶ **Space.** In a similar vein, the space configuration of most libraries remains the same as it has been for over 100 years. As the focus of the public library shifts from inventory control (knowing where physical materials are at any given moment) to collaborative learning, space conflicts arise creating tension between active space and the traditional “quiet” space. With a plan that emphasizes Acton Public Library’s role as a community hub, a comprehensive look at how space is currently used and can be reconfigured is essential.

Foundational Strategies

Equity. In measuring success, public libraries have often counted “how many” with less of an eye to “who” and “how.” As communities change and a desire to be responsive to unmet needs is articulated, it is important to shift the lens of the library to equity – creating the ability for all community members to access library programs and services in the manner that works best for them. This not only includes looking at who is participating in library services, but also thinking about how people are engaging, including their ability to access services and resources in both physical spaces and virtual spaces through use of technology.

▶ The five strategic goals that emerged

- Foster community, peer and intergenerational engagement
- Satisfy curiosity and stimulate imagination
- Promote civic engagement
- Support local economic development
- Provide exemplary service

Goal: Foster community, peer, and intergenerational engagement.

Offer opportunities and services that reflect community needs and interests, feature community voices, and create meaningful community and intergenerational experiences in an environment where everyone can feel welcome. In particular, Old Saybrook's young learners and their families will have the resources they need for success and lifelong learning.

Objectives:

Expand outreach to community organizations
(measurement: 1) connecting with a minimum of 2 community groups per month, 2) increase in co-sponsored programming)

Offer programs that promote connections between and for learners of all ages
(measurement: increase in program attendance, number of intergenerational programs offered, increase in repeat attendance)

Create physical and virtual spaces that meet community needs for learning and collaboration
(measurement: space usage)

Possible activities



- Identify newest and most active community groups and assign a library liaison
- Engage in intergenerational programming (teens/seniors; parents/children)
- Assess current space usage at different times of day
- Wear nametags that show which languages are spoken by staff members
- Consider outdoor spaces that the library can use for programming
- Identify the flexibility of the library's space to accommodate needs

Goal: Satisfy Curiosity & Stimulate Imagination

Community members will have the resources they need to explore topics of personal interest and continue to learn throughout their lives.

Community members will have materials and programs that excite their imaginations and provide enjoyable reading, viewing, and listening experiences.

Objectives:



Develop, build, and maintain collections and resources that are relevant and engaging
(measurement: increase in collection turnover rate and digital downloads)

Offer stimulating programs that provide hands-on learning opportunities
(measurement: program attendance)

Expand outreach to cultural organizations
(measurement: number of contacts)

Possible activities

- Develop collections in languages spoken by Old Saybrook community members
- Implement intergenerational programming
- Assign staff liaisons to cultural organizations
- Explore “maker-in-residence” options to bring writers, artists, and hands-on makers into the library

Goal: promote civic engagement

Community members will have the information they need to support and promote democracy, to fulfill their civic responsibilities at the local and state levels, and to fully participate in community decision-making.

Objectives

Increase outreach to civic groups and local leaders

(measurement: increase in contacts by 25% over baseline at the end of two years)

Expand and promote resources and databases with reliable information

(measurement: increase in usage by 25% at the end of two years)

Provide engaging opportunities for community members to learn about topics of local interest.

(measurement: increase in attendance/return attendees)

▸ Possible activities

- Hold an Open House for civic and community leaders
- Assess what current resources are most used and most requested
- Train all staff members and trustees to respond to questions about local topics

Goal: support economic development

Employers, entrepreneurs, and job seekers will have the resources they need to grow and succeed.

Objectives:

Increase library staff capacity to assist local employers, entrepreneurs, and job seekers in physical and digital spaces.

(measurement: number of staff trained by the end of two years)

Expand outreach to the business/entrepreneur community.

(measurement: increase in outreach contacts by 50% over baseline at the end of two years).

Offer physical and virtual resources and spaces that meet the needs of business owners, entrepreneurs, and job seekers.

(measurement: increase in usage of resources/spaces at the end of three years)

Possible activities

Identify current barriers to job seekers or entrepreneurs using physical or virtual spaces such as policies and space limitations

Assign a staff liaison to the Economic Development Commission

Visit/research other public libraries with successful business outreach/job seeker programs

Goal: Provide Exemplary Service

Acton Public Library will hire, train, encourage, and reward a knowledgeable and dedicated staff. The library will have the appropriate infrastructure in place to support its strategic goals and will be recognized in Old Saybrook as a community hub and trusted resource.

Objectives



Develop an organizational staffing and performance management structure that supports building an effective and patron-focused team.

Align the allocation of funding and resources with strategic priorities, including assessment of physical and digital infrastructure

Increase community recognition of Acton Library as relevant, community-centered hub in both physical and virtual spaces.

Possible activities

Assess library hiring practices to attract staff

Reorganize budget framework around strategic plan goals

Create a marketing and branding plan including logo redesign

Engage in overall space planning

Key Factors for Success

- Adopt an “assess, align, act” framework
- Staff development and alignment
- Community engagement
- Space reconfiguration

Your role

- Rework your agenda to support the new plan
- Inform the director of trends and issues
- Invite key people to attend events at the library
- Be politically strategic
- Lead as a body and set an example



“Bad libraries only build collections
Good libraries build services
Great libraries build community”

David Lankes, Library scholar and Dean of the University of Texas Library School

Thank you

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