



Ann Arbor District Library

Strategic Plan

Adopted by the Board of Trustees February 17, 2020

Prepared by Bridgeport Consulting, LLC

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
Letter from the Director	3
Where we are – and how we got here	4
The digital revolution	4
Demographic shifts.....	4
Income inequality.....	5
Social isolation.....	7
Sustainability	8
What defines us	9
Vision.....	9
Mission	9
Values.....	9
Where we are headed next	10
Strong downtown presence	10
Independence.....	10
Living our values.....	10

Letter from the Director

This strategic plan is notably different from previous plans the Ann Arbor District Library (AADL) has crafted over the years. In this document, you will not see a long list of ambitious initiatives that specify just exactly how we plan to serve the community over the next three to five years. You will not see a matrix of goals alongside the ways in which we intend to measure our progress. You will not be reassured that staff are developing an operational guide to track the implementation of the Board-approved document.

Make no mistake: that's how we've done strategic planning for years, and we're *really* good at it. In fact, that's the point. Strategic planning has evolved from a formal process the organization undertakes every few years to be simply who we are, and how we work. Over the course of the past twenty-plus years, AADL has matured into a *strategic thinking and doing* organization. The decisions our library professionals make on a day-to-day basis – whether interacting with patrons at a public desk, planning an event with one of our many community partners, or developing the preventive maintenance schedule for our five facilities – are grounded in a shared ethic.

That ethic is captured most succinctly in the organization's core values. When we embarked upon this most recent strategic planning process, we realized that while the concepts embodied in our current values remained mostly intact in practice, the language we have come to use has drifted from the original statements. Our values were due for revision, so that's where we focused a fair bit of our time and energy this time around.

I am proud of the result. I believe our newly articulated values are meaningful, and resilient enough to guide us into the future: through turnover in the organization; through social, technological, and political changes we cannot possibly foresee; whether the economy thrives or stumbles. We have also, of course, considered where we've been and where we're going, and you'll see the results of that work in this document as well. No matter what lies ahead, by living our values, I am confident AADL will remain a relevant – and treasured – resource to our community long into the future.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Josie".

Josie Parker, Library Director

Where we are – and how we got here

The Ann Arbor District Library we know today can trace roots back to the early 1820s. From early groups including the Ann Arbor Library Association and The Working Men's Library Association, through the establishment of the Ladies' Library Association in 1866, the community's interest in public access to reading resources has long been evident.

Fast forward nearly two centuries, and this interest remains robust – so much so that AADL's commitment to public ownership continues to be named in the current mission statement. Over that time, however, our collective imagination regarding what a library is and does has naturally expanded.

Today, we embrace the library's role not only in providing public ownership and access to a wide range of materials, but also in offering an equally broad variety of programs designed to extend opportunities for learning, social connections, and fun to all who participate. The library's accessibility as a non-partisan, free-of-charge, community gathering space has also risen in importance. Several key trends have influenced this evolution of the library, and also inform the possible futures for which AADL is preparing.

The digital revolution

The advent of the “information age” in the mid-to-late 20th century, in which digital electronics established dominance over mechanical technologies, resulted in a dramatic shift in the way people access information. With vast amounts of data readily available from an ever-increasing proliferation of sources – not all of which are reputable – the library is positioned to serve as a credible, trusted navigator. AADL both provides unbiased access to information and stands at the ready to guide patrons in making sense of what they discover. The need for us to remain current with new technologies as they emerge, no matter how rapidly, will persist.

Demographic shifts

Between now and the year 2050, the United States population is expected to increase by about 100 million people, largely driven by immigration from developing countries. During that time, minorities will likely come to represent more than 50% of the population. The proportion of the population aged 65+ will likely increase to approximately 20% (from a current 13%). Meanwhile, the nation's young working population will also grow, largely due to the combined influence of higher birth rates among recent immigrants, and the

“baby boomlet” that is anticipated to occur as the offspring of the Baby Boomer generation bear children of their own.¹

When it comes to Michigan, the shift in diversity will likely play out in a similar pattern but to a lesser degree. The likelihood that two randomly-selected individuals from Michigan will be of different racial/ethnic backgrounds is projected to be 60% by the year 2060, while nationwide this “diversity index” will be closer to 70%. Statewide population growth, however, is anticipated to lag behind other states, with Michigan dropping out of the top ten most populous states within the decade.²

AADL celebrates diversity as an important lens through which to inform decisions about how best to serve our patrons. Through many years of experimentation, AADL has built a strong portfolio of programs, events, and services that are designed to reach the broadest possible audience. We know this work is never done. As our community continues to evolve, so will AADL – crafting offerings and creating ways to connect with new people while we continue to serve our existing patron population.

With the emphasis on intellectual freedom and individual choice, this plan underscores the intention that *everyone* should be able to find and follow their particular interests at the library. At the same time, AADL provides opportunities for individuals, in the course of pursuing their interests, to discover and/or create a sense of community among other patrons and participants. Public libraries allow people from all backgrounds and identities (defined as expansively as possible) to mix and interact. Given the troubling trends of income inequality and social isolation described in the following sections, AADL embraces our role not only as a service provider, but also as a platform for human connection.

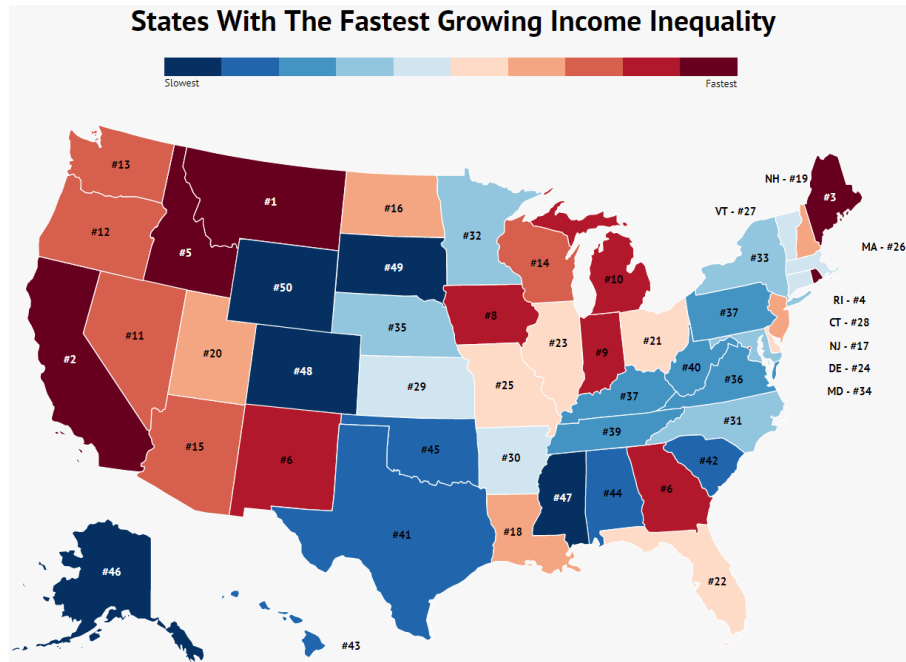
Income inequality

In 2016, the Michigan League for Public Policy published a report stating that Michigan’s income inequality is the 11th worst in the nation, with the state’s top 1% of income earners

¹ From “The Changing Demographics of America,” Smithsonian Magazine online, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/the-changing-demographics-of-america-538284/>

² From “Michigan’s Racial/Ethnic Diversity Grows, but Not as Much as US,” Detroit Free Press online, www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/2014/10/24/michigan-diversity-index-racial-demographics/17671861/

making twenty-two times as much as the remaining 99%.³ Two years later, Michigan was identified as the state with the 10th fastest *growing* income inequality in the country, suggesting that this trend has the potential to worsen rather than improve.⁴



Locally, this reality is equally – if not more – pronounced. The Washtenaw County Office of Community and Economic Development (OCED) created an “Opportunity Index” in 2015 to illustrate the distribution of key assets such as health, education, job access, economic vitality, and neighborhood safety and stability among populations in the county. (See <http://www.opportunitywashtenaw.org/opportunity-index.html> for more information.) Perhaps unsurprisingly, areas of highest opportunity are concentrated in Ann Arbor,⁵

³ From “Michigan Income Inequality 11th Worst In Nation,” Michigan League for Public Policy online, <https://mlpp.org/michigan-income-inequality-11th-worst-in-nation-wealthiest-1-make-22-times-more-than-rest-of-workers/>

⁴ From “US states with the highest levels of income inequality,” CNBC online, <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/03/12/us-states-with-the-highest-levels-of-income-inequality.html>

⁵ From “Here's what 'high' and 'low' opportunity looks like in Washtenaw County,” MLive, https://www.mlive.com/news/ann-arbor/2018/09/heres_what_high_and_low_opport.html

which aligns with Richard Florida’s 2015 finding that Ann Arbor is the 8th most economically segregated metropolitan area in the nation.⁶

While we acknowledge the significant benefits of being located in a resource-rich community, AADL also embraces our role in serving *everyone*. The library’s role in ensuring access for those who are economically disadvantaged is perhaps more urgent than ever.

Social isolation

In addition to the increasing economic segregation described above, people have become more socially isolated in recent years, a phenomenon that is described as an “epidemic of loneliness.”⁷ In a recent survey conducted by health care insurer Cigna, nearly half of all respondents indicate that they often feel alone or left out; nearly 13% report that *zero* people know them well.⁸

Factors that contribute to this alarming trend include the increasing number of adults who live alone (nearly one out of three) combined with shrinking social networks and fewer meaningful connections with others.⁹ This is a sad irony given the rise of social media that provides the illusion of connectedness, while actually increasing loneliness, anxiety, and depression, especially in frequent users.¹⁰

Libraries have long claimed their role as a “third place;” neither home nor work, but a safe, accessible location for people to meet, gather, and simply be in the company of others – whether participating in a program together or just happening to occupy the same space. This “third place” is especially crucial in times of trouble with library branches serving as important nodes in the local emergency preparedness network, offering shelter and basic services in severe weather. This role may increase in importance in coming years, given the emerging and impending impacts of climate change.

⁶ From “America’s Most Economically Segregated Cities,” CityLab online, <https://www.citylab.com/life/2015/02/americas-most-economically-segregated-cities/385709/>

⁷ From “The Loneliness Epidemic” by the Health Resources and Services Administration online, <https://www.hrsa.gov/enews/past-issues/2019/january-17/loneliness-epidemic>

⁸ From “An epidemic of loneliness” in the Week online, <https://theweek.com/articles/815518/epidemic-loneliness>

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ From “Does Social Media Cause Depression?” from the Child Mind Institute online, <https://childmind.org/article/is-social-media-use-causing-depression/>

Sustainability

Speaking of climate change, the Ann Arbor District Library has been attending to issues of environmental sustainability for a number of years. In the early 2000s, AADL's physical footprint expanded with the opening of new branch facilities, all of which employed sustainable building practices. For example, the Malletts Creek Branch incorporated a combination of solar heating, natural daylighting, stormwater capture and reuse, and native plantings. The American Institute of Architects Michigan (AIA Michigan) recognized AADL for this approach with an Award for Sustainable Design in 2005. Similar practices were employed at the Pittsfield and Traverwood Branches in subsequent years.

The library also serves as an important convening space for community-based initiatives such as the Sustainable Ann Arbor Forum. Convened by the City of Ann Arbor, the Forum includes a speaker series, often complemented by other events and activities, that allows community participants to learn about and discuss topics of sustainability. In addition to the inherently "green" role that all libraries play in providing for ongoing reuse of materials via a shared collection, AADL remains committed to environmentally sound practices in our own operations, and to providing engaged partnership with other organizations that are leading work in this domain.

What defines us

AADL's current vision and mission statements remain unchanged from previous strategic planning efforts. The below set of values statements are newly articulated, though they remain conceptually aligned with the previous iteration.

Vision

The Ann Arbor District Library provides collections, programs, and leadership to promote the development of literate and informed citizens through open and equal access to cultural, intellectual, recreational, and information resources.

Mission

The existence of the Ann Arbor District assures public ownership of print collections, digital resources, and gathering spaces for the citizens of the library district. We are committed to sustaining the value of public library services for the greater Ann Arbor community through the use of traditional and innovative technologies.

Values

- Welcoming* Everything we do is designed to create an exceptionally welcoming patron experience.

- Equitable* We work to dismantle barriers to opportunity, so everyone can take full advantage of what AADL has to offer.

- Open* We are fierce protectors of intellectual freedom and individual choice.

- Responsible* We are careful stewards of resources, recognizing our central directive to advance the public good.

- Adaptive* We honor our history while remaining nimble, creative, and flexible to respond to our patrons' interests.

Where we are headed next

AADL plans to remain attuned both to the broader societal trends that will inevitably influence our work, and to the more immediate realities, needs, and interests of our local community. Rather than attempting to forecast with the library's exact portfolio of programs or services in three or five years, AADL is confident in naming the following broadly-stated commitments that will define our future.

Strong downtown presence

A thriving, vibrant downtown is core to Ann Arbor's quality of life. A healthy mix of dense commercial and residential development, combined with valued public institutions and amenities and supported by a multimodal transportation system, is the hallmark of resilient communities. AADL will continue to contribute to this mix by maintaining a proud flagship presence in the downtown district. We have not yet determined how that presence is best actualized: whether by renovating an existing facility or building new, remaining in place or pursuing a new location. AADL is in the early data-gathering and planning stages and will proceed thoughtfully as we learn more.

Independence

AADL intends to retain control over our own destiny. The library benefits from a passionate and committed set of elected Trustees; a seasoned administrative leadership team, combined with a deep bench of talent on staff; the hard-earned confidence of the public; a perpetual millage that provides assurance of long-term sustainability; a dedicated corps of volunteers, donors, and supporters; and countless other assets. We believe we serve these interests most faithfully when we remain above the fray of any current or future political fractures. We are mindful of our mandate to steward public funds responsibly, and everything we undertake will align with this value, including the way we operate, maintain, and upgrade our facilities.

Living our values

Our values provide the filter by which we make decisions on both a day-to-day and long-term basis. The unconventionally high "altitude" of this plan is intentional; AADL is committed to flexible adaptation as the needs of our community evolve over time. Our values will serve as the compass by which we navigate that adaptation.