Strategic Plan for Howard County Library

2013-2016

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**Historical Background: About the Howard County Library**

Howard County and its eponymous library system are located in the central part of Maryland, situated between Baltimore and Washington D.C.  The library’s free and public access is due in part to the community’s dedication to public education and equal access to all.  A hallmark of this dedication was evident as early as the 1770s, when the Ellicott family created one of the first public schools in Maryland, open to all the children of the community (Howard County Library, 2012e).  Howard County was the last county in Maryland to offer free public library service to its citizens (Howard County Library, 2012e), and again the community’s dedication and support made this feat possible.  In the 1930s, the Women’s Civic Club of Ellicott City started to plan the establishment of the Howard County Library system (Howard County Library, 2012e).  This club collaborated with Ellicott City Elementary School, who allowed them to use a portable building located in the school to house the first public library in Howard County (Howard County Library, 2012e).  In 1940, the Howard County Library officially opened its doors in its founding location in Ellicott City Elementary, in addition to three other supporting locations positioned throughout Howard County; also housed in various school locations (Lisbon High School, Fredrick High School, and Friendship School) (Howard County Library, 2012e).  The original operating budget was only $900; however the library was bolstered by the strong support of the community in funding, materials, and volunteers (Howard County Library, 2012e).  The first professional librarian, Lena Baker Burgess, was hired by Howard County Library in November of 1943 (Howard County Library, 2012e).  Burgess had formerly been a teacher at Ellicott Elementary School and her husband, Lionel Burgess, was principal of the school and a founding member of the Friends of the Howard County Library (Howard County Library, 2012e).

In 1963, Howard County Library hired its first library director, Marvin Thomas (Howard County Library, 2012b).  He helped to oversee the construction and updating of the many branches that now make up the Library system, which were built to accommodate the ever-increasing population and needs of Howard County.  Current library director and CEO, Valerie Gross, was hired in 2001 (Howard County Library, 2012b).  Upon entering the library system at the turn of the 21st century, her challenge was to redefine the role of the Library system, “in an age where technology was at the fingertips of each member of the community” (Howard County Library, 2012e).  The Howard County Library carried out this redefinition by looking to its roots for inspiration.  At its inception in the 1940s, the Library System existed not only as an organization operating in conjunction with the Howard County Public School system, but also as a component that existed within its very walls that supported its larger humanitarian goals of free and quality education for all citizens.  With Gross’ help, the Howard County Library widened its focus beyond the notion of the library as a place for “books, magazines, and movies” with “the image of library professionals as caretakers of those collections”, to a system where the library was seen as a “major component of Howard County’s strong education system” (Howard County Library, 2012e).

The responsibilities and physical manifestations of the Howard County Library system have transformed over time to accommodate the ever-changing landscape of Howard County in order to best meet the needs of its population.  Today the Howard County Library System is comprised of six locations: The main Miller Branch library which is located in Ellicott City, along with five additional branches peppered throughout the county; the East Columbia Branch, the Elkridge Branch in Elkridge, Glenwood Branch in Cooksville, the Central Branch in Columbia, and the Savage Branch in Laurel (Howard County Library, 2012c). Population growth has always been a motivating factor for the library to expand its facilities and services to all areas of the County (Howard County Library, 2012e).  The library estimated that population growth in Howard County, beginning with 2000 population totals, will increase by 27.62% by the year 2030 (Providence Associates Inc., 2004a).  According to the 2010 Census, Howard County’s population is 287,085 people, with the median age at 37 years old (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).  Astoundingly, in 2004 the Library determined that an impressive 95% of the County population had library cards, thanks in part to its A+ partnership with the public schools (Providence Associates Inc., 2004b).  Although racial diversity is low in more rural parts of the county, with much of its diversity concentrated in the Columbia/Ellicott City area, the state reported a recent growth trend in minority populations (Maryland Department of Planning, 2011).  Population totals account for a racial breakdown of: 62% White, 17.5% Black, 14% Asian, and 6% Latino, and the Black and Asian populations of the County have created a “majority minority” which are expected to continue to grow in future (Maryland Department of Planning, 2011).

Keeping a close eye on increasing population sizes, Howard County Library determined in 2004 that they were not up to national standards in sizing of library facilities which is typically measured at “one sq. ft. of space per capita” (Providence Associates Inc., 2004).  The library housed a substantially lower ratio of .62 sq. ft. of library space per capita and in order to provide a solution to the inadequate amount of space for the user base, the librarybegan construction of the new Charles E. Miller Branch and Historical Center in December 2011, tripling the size of the previous facility in addition to being a LEED certified building that maximizes energy efficiency (Howard County Library, 2012a).  Upon completion of the Miller Branch the main branch was moved from the Central Branch in Columbia to this newly-built branch.

The recent economic recession has had a negative impact in generating revenue in Howard County, causing it to have to make tough decisions about spending such as deferring much needed infrastructure maintenance that include road re-pavements and sidewalk repair (Howard County, 2010). Fiscally considered a part of the education system itself, Howard County has always had a strong commitment to its fellow educational institutions, and despite economic woes, continues to show its support by allocating a large part of its total budget to these institutions-54% in fiscal year 2012 (Howard County, 2010).  Additionally, the budget allotment to the Howard County Library increased by 7.32%, over one-million extra dollars, from fiscal year 2011 to 2012 (Howard County, 2010).  This financial commitment has made many positive impacts in not only on the institutions themselves but also on the high quality of life in Howard County.

Howard County has been consistently ranked highly as one of the best places to live in the country, and the Library has received many accolades by various organizations.  Columbia/ Ellicott City was ranked #2 in 2010 by Money Magazine as one of the “Best Places to Live”, acknowledging it as an “economic powerhouse” with an “affordable, wide range of housing”, “tons of parkland”, “diverse population”, “excellent schools” and low jobless rate (Money Magazine, 2010).  The County has also ranked as the “Healthiest Maryland County” each year since 2010 by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the University of Wisconsin (2012).  The Howard County Library System has excelled in the same fashion as the County, which was ranked #4 in its population served category by HALPR in 2010 (Hennen, 2010), and is consistent in its superlative 5 star rating by Library Journal (Library Journal, 2011).

**Mission, Vision and Values**

**Our Mission:**  We deliver high-quality public education for all ages (Howard County Library, 2012d).  
**Our Vision:**  As a major component of Howard County's strong education system, we advance the economy, enhancing quality of life (Howard County Library, 2012d).  
**Our Values:**  As an integral part of Howard County’s strong education system, Howard County Library System delivers high-quality public education for all ages through a curriculum that comprises three pillars (Adapted from Howard County Library Strategic Plan, 2010):

1. Self-Directed Education: This pillar includes our vast collection of items in print, audio, and electronic formats; as well as thousands of online resources.
2. Research Assistance and Instruction: Tailored for both individuals and groups, this pillar includes personalized research assistance, as well as classes, seminars, and workshops for all ages, taught or facilitated by HCLS Instructors.
3. Instructive and Enlightening Experiences: In addition to our signature events and partnerships, this pillar includes the cultural and community center concepts.

Howard County Library System has established seven “authentic values” as the foundation upon which we build our system (Howard County Library, 2005).  These core values are the beliefs that unite us in common purpose and enable us to identify what is truly important to our customers and ourselves. Our values are our compass, guiding decisions and relationships with each other and our customers. We strive, at all times, to make our personal behavior consistent with these values:

* Respect
* Continuing Education
* Inclusiveness
* Exceptional Customer Service
* Unity
* Progress
* Assertive Communication

**Environmental Scan**

**Standard of Living**

Portions of Howard County, Maryland have consistently been listed in Money Magazine’s Top Ten best places to live in the country. The Columbia/Ellicott City area is currently ranked as number eight because of its schools, low cost of living, diversity, outdoor spaces, and its combination of suburban and urban living (Money Magazine, 2012).

According to the 2010 U.S. Census (State & County Quickfacts, 2012), the median household income in Howard County is over thirty thousand dollars more a year than the Maryland average at $103,273 compared to $70,647 (State & County Quickfacts, 2012). Unemployment in Howard County is currently below 5% compared to the state average of 6.5% according to 2012 estimates (Mid-Atlantic Information Office, 2012).  
  
**Population and Diversity**

This high standard of living has brought an unprecedented population boom in the last few years. The overall population grew 2.1% between 2010 and 2011, and within the last 10 years, over 50,000 people have migrated to the area (State & County Quickfacts, 2012). This population boom has created a greater need for library services. In 2001, HCLS answered over 1.5 million research questions asked and hosted over 220,000 people in classes and events (Howard County Library, 2011).  
 Howard County’s new residents are also reflecting a shift towards greater diversity in the area – the Asian populations in particular, having tripled in the last decade (New York Times, 2011). This has caused an increase in the demand for more world language materials and services.

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**Educational Values**

Howard County values education highly. Current data shows that the majority of Howard County’s high schools place in the top 50 schools in the state (U.S. News and World Report, 2012). According to the 2010 U.S. census, the high school graduation rate is 94.6% and the percentage of bachelor’s degree or higher in the county stands at 58.3%.

These educational values have created an enormous demand for community and continuing education which the public library system has sought to fill with targeted resources, classes, and events. While in most cases, the county budget lists public libraries under recreation and leisure spending, Howard County lists its public libraries under educational spending. This has been advantageous to the library system when county government considers its budget.

**Legislation**

In 2012, legislation was presented to the state court that would push the responsibility of teacher pensions on the individual counties as opposed to the state carrying the burden (Michael, 2012). If this law is enacted in FY13, it would become a significant weight on the local budget, costing millions of dollars. While cuts in staffing are not anticipated, the materials budget may suffer some cuts in budget.

**SWOT Analysis**

**Strengths**

* The new Miller Branch
  + Multiple meeting area for large and small groups.
  + 100 public computers.
  + Partnership with the Ellicott City Historical Society.
* A+ Partnership with the public school system and community college
  + Key partner in the educational standing of the school system.
  + Major outreach and exchange programs for greater exposure.
  + All Kindergarteners are signed up for library cards when they start school.
* Library collections
  + Largest ASL and world language collections in the county.
* Community support
  + The Friends of Howard County Library.
  + Evening in the Stacks - a yearly fundraiser that brings thousands of dollars to the library.
  + Educational values that encourage continuing and self-directed education.
* Open Source Software
  + Open Source Software programs are created with the intention of being free to use and distribute and are protected by an Open Source License to prevent false copyright creation.
  + Program variety free for customer use.

**Weaknesses**

* Services to the booming foreign-born population
* Allocation funding to smaller branches

**Opportunities**

* Expansion of services to foreign-born population
  + Increase materials collection.
  + Create a partnership with FIRN.
* The STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) Grant
  + Provided an additional $100,000 in order to expand our technological resources for teens.
  + Creation of the STEM Lab at the Savage Branch.
  + Additional staffing for STEM program development.
* CA (Columbia Association) Partnership
  + The CA is in the process of building an urban center in the heart of Howard County.
  + Striving towards better public transportation which will bring more people to the library more easily.
  + Increase of population with more potential customers to serve.

**Threats**

* Shift of teacher pensions from state to local budgets
* Change in political climate due to shifting populations

**Goals and Assessments**

**Goal 1: Require education certification of all supervisors.**

Keeping in line with the mission of Howard County Library, ‘public education for all’,   
  
we will create a HCL certified training program in pedagogy in order to legitimize our  
  
staff as instructors. To implement this plan we will enact the following steps.

**Strategies:**

• Make educational training a prerequisite for any supervisor position.

• Expect supervisors to impart their knowledge to subordinates so that the

mission is carried out at all levels of the library.

• Offer scholarships for continued education or teaching credentials to those

interested.

• Communicate this certification to customers via labeling on a nametags,

shirts, lanyards, etc.

**Assessment:**

• Success will be determined by measuring higher attendance at classes

and programs, and by analyzing user feedback and data on surveys and

comment cards.

• Gather statistics on class attendance before certification is implemented

and compare those to new attendance metrics after pedagogical program is

adopted.

**Goal 2: Upgrade technological facets of library services and marketing.**  
  
The gadget savvy library user wishes to interact with the library on multiple interfaces  
  
through multiple avenues. There cannot be just one place to virtually access the library,  
  
and library/user communication must be strengthened via technology. HCL is already  
  
well equipped with technology in-house, but we want to bring the library to the user. We  
  
propose three starting points to further the library’s technological identity, and remain in  
  
touch with the users when they are away from our brick and mortar locations.

**Strategies**:

• Create a texting return/renewal reminder service so users do not have to

visit the website to figure out simple information such as this. The user

will receive texts reminding them of their currently checked-out material

and its due date. This would be a voluntary service, and the information

will still be available on the website. This service will be more convenient

for the user.

• Create a mobile website that is designed to fit the format of smartphones.

This site will be accessed via a web browser on the smartphone.

• Create a free mobile HCL app that can circumvent the need to connect

to an Internet service, as mentioned above. HCLS can remind users of

returns/renewals through this app via push notifications.

• Update the iRecommend blog and supplement it with appropriate

marketing. Users can visit this blog to read staff book or media recommendations,

as well as post their own reviews and recommendations. We will use goodreads.com

as a model.

**Assessment:**

• The texting service’s success will be determined by the number of users

who sign up for this service as well as an improvement in the timeliness

of returned books.

• The mobile site’s success will be measured by the number of visits and

in evaluating the specific uses of the site. This information will be

gathered by session cookies, which are already in use, and will not infringe

on the privacy of the user.

• The mobile app’s success will be determined by user ratings in the app

store, as well as the number of times it has been downloaded.

• Book/media suggestions on the iRecommend blog can be tracked via

circulation metrics, to see if their recommendations spark more borrowing

statistics. The blog will be monitored for inappropriate material.

**Goal 3: Partner with local institutions that are not already associated with the**  
  
**HCLS.**  
  
HCL will expand its partnerships to better serve the community within Howard County.  
  
Potential partnerships include FIRN and art institutions like Columbia Arts Center,  
  
Community Colleges’ art programs, and the Howard County Arts Council. FIRN is  
  
a nonprofit organization that caters to new immigrants and provides services that a  
  
newcomer might need such as immigration counseling, health and social services referral,   
  
literacy programs, and interpreting/translation services.

**Strategies:**

• We will offer a space in the library where FIRN can introduce their

services to those who may not know about the organization. With the

space will come wider exposure for the organization, and hopefully an

increase in library visitors. This space will be offered at the Miller branch

library, an area with a booming immigrant population.

• Through this partnership HCL can highlight its ESL and world language

collections, as well as appropriate classes or seminars.

• FIRN volunteers will give interested parties a tour of the library and point

out collections that could help the new citizen in acculturating to their new

setting. These could include ESL, American history, foreign language and

employment literature.

• Have FIRN/HCLS organize a minimum number of classes, workshops,

lectures and drop in sessions.

• In our desire to reach different constituencies, HCLS will partner with

Columbia Arts Center, Community College Art Departments, and the

Howard County Arts council in order to offer a gallery space in which any

interested local artist can apply to have his work shown.

• These art exhibitions will occur quarterly and have different themes or

artists every time.

• HCLS will be in direct contact with Community College artists and

encourage them to show their work in our space.

• Artists will be encouraged to donate their pieces to the annual

‘Evening in the Stacks’: a silent auction.

**Assessment:**  
  
**Art partnership**

• Count attendants as well as artists to glean the popularity of the program

• Encourage guests to put their names in a sign-in guest book, and make a

sign-up sheet available for artists for future exhibitions.

• We have a goal of a 5% increase in visitors, and interested artists from

show to show (we couldn’t easily accommodate an exponentially growing

number of artists, however we will take all of the visitors we can get!).

• Include a special page on our website for the current art show, and monitor

visits to that site.

• Make available Likert-scale surveys and comment cards for patrons to fill

out. From this information we can assess the popularity (or lack thereof)

of the exhibitions, and act on reasonable visitor requests.

**FIRN partnership**

• Assess the metrics on usage of HCLS’ foreign language and ESL

collections. A significant increase in circulation will deem the partnership

successful.

• An increase in a collection that reflects the growing community brought on

by increased demand of particular books.

**Appendix A:**

**Strategic Plan Process**

While working together as a team, each member of our group met together on the class website. We decided to meet on Friday evenings because it was the best day and time for everyone due to our schedules.  During our first meeting, we decided to focus on Howard County Library System which is located in Howard County, Maryland.  We also divided the major sections and determined which group member would focus on which session.  In the beginning, we were meeting every two weeks to discuss our project and the progress of our project.  But, during the past month, we have been meeting every Friday evening. This was the time when we brainstormed for the strategic plan and when we asked questions to make sure that we were on the right track or in agreement with each other.  We used a variety of sources in order to help this group to come up with ideas of the strategic plan.

Spatial divides had a great influence on the way we communicated and worked together as a group. Half of our group is located on the West Coast and the other half is on the East Coast. Since our group has never met in person we had to make use of technology in order to share documents, ideas, and drafts of our Strategic Plan. While not in scheduled group meetings, we communicated with each other by e-mail. Another technology that we utilized to accomplish open communication was a shared Google Folder via Google Drive. This folder, only viewable and editable by members of the group, was divided into subfolders for each section of the Strategic Plan assignment. All members of the group could add, view, and edit documents in these folders. It was a great way to share ideas efficiently and a useful way to organize our ideas, relevant documents, and drafts in one set location, equally accessible by all group members.

**Appendix B:**

**A Summary of Information Collected**

**Historical Background** - There are two sources that we considered to be the most important. These sources come from the Howard County Public Library website.  One is a video titled, “Traditions – The History of Howard County Library system” and the other is a timeline of Howard County Library System.  Both of these sources discuss the history of the public library system from its beginnings in 1940 to the present.

**Demographics** - There are two sources that we considered to be most valuable.  One source is an article titled, “Minorities Continue to Lead Maryland Population Gain” by the Maryland Department of Planning.  This article discusses the growth of the minority population in Maryland, and how it contributed to the over population growth in this state between the years of 2010 and 2011.   The other source that we considered to be most valuable is “Howard County’s Foreign-Born Community: Dimensions, Growth and Implications” by the Association for the Study and Development of Community.  This article discusses the foreign-born population growth in Maryland.  This article includes the examinations of the demographic and locational characteristics among the foreign-born groups, examination of the characteristics that are similar and different between the different groups, and the assessment of the needs of the foreign-born groups.

**Environmental Scan** - The most valuable source is the Annual Report of the Howard County Library System.  This report discusses the various programs and services that have been offered by the library.  In addition, it offers statistics, donor lists, and a description of Howard County’s reputation of being one of the best counties to live in.

**Strategic Plan** – The most valuable source is “Saint Paul’s Strategic Plan” by Stu Wilson.  This article describes the strategic plan that was created by Saint Paul Public Library in 2005, and it offers tips in helping libraries to develop strategic plans.

**Appendix C:**

**Budget Information**

**Recent Budget**

· Fiscal Year 2011 - $15,229,779  
· Fiscal Year 2012 - $16, 345, 254  
· Growth from 2011 to 2012 - $1,115,475 (7.32%)

**Current Organizational Budget (Fiscal Year 2013)**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | **Annual** | **Current** | **Current** | **Remaining** | **%** |
|  |  | **Budget** | **Period** | **YTD** | **Budget** | **Remaining** |
| **Revenue** | |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | County Funding | $16,961,218.00 | $1,413,434.00 | $5,653,736.00 | $11,307,482.00 | 66.7% |
|  | State Funding | $823,740.00 | $0.00 | $270,745.33 | $552,994.67 | 67.1% |
|  | HCLS Generated Funds | $769,000.00 | $65,384.57 | $279,649.93 | $489,350.07 | 63.6% |
| **Total Revenue** | | $18,553,958.00 | $1,478,818.57 | $6,204,131.26 | $12,349,826.74 | 66.6% |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Expenses** | |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | Object 1 - Salaries & Benefits | $14,939,056.00 | $1,230,523.96 | $4,768,689.47 | $10,170,366.53 | 68.1% |
|  | Object 2 - Contracts | $728,689.00 | $48,222.21 | $361,381.74 | $367,307.26 | 50.4% |
|  | Object 3 - Books & Materials | $2,650,582.00 | $315,160.61 | $991,980.18 | $1,658,601.82 | 62.6% |
|  | Object 4 - Professional Development | $78,307.00 | $5,624.68 | $18,371.50 | $59,935.50 | 76.5% |
|  | Object 5 - Equipment | $157,324.00 | $889.56 | $5,986.55 | $151,337.45 | 96.2% |
| **Total Expenses** | | $18,553,958.00 | $1,600,421.02 | $6,146,409.44 | $12,407,548.56 | 66.9% |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Revenues Over (Under) Expenses** | | $0.00 | -$121,602.45 | $57,721.82 | -$57,721.82 | 0.0% |

**Appendix D:**

**Organization Chart of Howard County Library**

(Adapted from Howard County, approved operating budget FY 2012)

**Appendix E:**

**Description of Physical Facilities**

**Central Branch:** The Central Branch of Howard County Library System is located in downtown Columbia, Maryland.  This branch has over 200,000 items in its collections.  In addition, there are 92 computers that are available for public use.  All computers contain word processing and two computers in the children’s department are designated for gaming.  Each year this branch welcomes over 500,000 visitors, with 627,778 visiting during the fiscal year of 2012.

**East Columbia Branch:** The East Columbia Branch has a positive reputation, evidenced by the awards it received for Architectural Excellence from the Potomac Valley Chapter of the American Institute of Architects and from the Maryland Society of the American Institute of Architects. This branch contains a spacious and open floor plan, a children’s rainforest walkway, a children’s theatrical classroom, and silent study rooms.  The East Columbia Branch completed construction 1994 and is home to the administrative offices of the Howard County Library System and the 50+ center.  This branch recorded more than a half-million visits during the 2012 fiscal year.

**Elkridge Branch:** The Elkridge Branch focuses the Howard County Library System’s curriculum to the population of this county and focuses mainly on children’s services.  This branch contains a sea-themed mosaic which was created by art students from Elkridge Landing Middle School.  There are 44 computers available for public use.  During the 2012 fiscal year, this branch recorded 441,931 visits.

**Glenwood Branch:** Established in 2000, the Glenwood Branch has an award-winning architectural design that reflects the agricultural heritage of the area.  One of its notable features is the “Story Barn” which is used for preschool classes.  This branch contains a large collection of materials, many computer workstations, a children’s classroom, and a multi-purpose meeting room.  In addition, there are 47 computers that are available for public use.  During the 2012 fiscal year, this branch recorded 235,426 visits.

C**harles E. Miller Branch & Historical Center:**  The Charles E. Miller Branch & Historical Center is the newest and largest branch of the Howard County Library System.  It opened on December 17, 2011.  This branch contains approximately a quarter million items, 100 computers that are available to the public, and nine quiet study rooms.  The classroom space at this branch varies with a meeting room of 3,000 square feet, a children’s classroom at 800 square feet, and a Tech Lab at 800 square feet.  There are also two special outdoor features at this branch.  One is the Terrace Outlook where patrons can read and work outdoors and the other is the Enchanted Garden which focuses on health, nutrition, and environmental education.  This branch is energy efficient and contains 72 solar panels, controlled natural daylights, and a vegetative roof.  In addition, this branch contains a dashboard in its lobby that helps accurately track the energy usage of the building.

**Savage Branch:** Like the Elkridge Branch, the Savage Branch delivers curriculum to the Howard County population and focuses mainly on children’s services.  This branch, which has been open since 1991, contains 43 computers that are available to the public.  During the fiscal year of 2012, 316,937 visits were recorded.

**Appendix F:**

**Hours of Operation**

Hours of Operation  
· Monday thru Thursday – 10:00 am – 9:00 pm  
· Friday and Saturday – 10:00 am – 6:00 pm  
· Sunday – 1:00 pm – 5:00 pm (Sundays are open for operation until June 16, 2013)

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