

# readlearnconnect

STRATEGIC PLAN 2006 — 2010

Public libraries are an essential part of life in the United States. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Multnomah County, Oregon. After years of investment and support from taxpayers through voter-approved bonds and local option levies, Multnomah County residents have shown what a public library can become to the people it serves. The library is a recognized force in Multnomah County that significantly contributes to positive outcomes for individuals and communities. Yet even as we celebrate the success of the library in meeting community needs, we recognize the necessity for continual improvement.

Try to imagine life without libraries. Here is what you might see. Only those who have sufficient financial resources could read, view, or listen to what they wanted or needed. Tens of thousands of school-age children and teens would have no place to turn after school or to improve their reading during the summer. Very young, at-risk children might not be exposed to books and early literacy activities, so essential to brain development. The rich resources of the Internet and online databases would be accessible only to those who could afford them. Older adults, whose minds are keen but whose fixed incomes often afford them only the bare essentials, would not be able to engage in the intellectual life that is so essential to their well-being. Large corporations would have access to the information they needed to make wise business decisions, but small and start-up businesses might not be able to compete. The United States, which has built the largest and most successful democratic republic of the free world, would

be without an essential part of its communities that for generations has helped immigrants learn English and other essential skills. People from all walks of life would be without a ubiquitous resource to help them achieve their dreams. The public library's role in supporting an informed electorate, critical for the functioning of a democracy, would be missing. Welcoming, vibrant neighborhood public spaces, vital to building community, would be lost.

Multnomah County Library welcomes and supports all people in their enjoyment of reading and lifelong learning. We do this by paying special attention to individual and community needs, and by understanding that people connect with library services from an infinite variety of backgrounds and circumstances. In order to provide free and open access to information, ideas and knowledge, Multnomah County Library embraces the reality that individuals and communities seek library services from diverse and multicultural backgrounds. We seek to engage their minds and expand opportunities for all to realize their full potential and contribute to society. We tailor our services to meet community needs, including striving to reflect the community's diversity in our staff, resources and services. Our physical and virtual places provide welcoming spaces for programs that inform and engage people in learning and deepening understanding of our community and the world.

In short, Multnomah County Library serves as a force in the community to read, learn and connect.

### ***Why is the library so important to our community?***

For more than 140 years, people of all ages have turned to Multnomah County Library for books and information, for storytimes and community discussions, for delivery of reading materials to homebound people, for sophisticated technology to find information — in short, for opportunities to read, learn and connect.

One of the most extraordinary characteristics of our community is its enthusiastic use of its library. Since 2003, Multnomah County residents have checked out so many items each year that the library's annual circulation of 19.4 million items — or 28.4 books per person — exceeds any other library system in the United States.

In the coming years, Multnomah County Library is committed to providing county residents with convenient access to books and information, in state-of-the-art neighborhood libraries and via 24/7 online connections. The library's new strategic plan shapes this commitment and guides the library's efforts through 2010.

### ***Why does the library need a strategic plan?***

Multnomah County Library's strategic plan is an important tool that helps the library and its stakeholders move together in the same direction. It helps our customers and potential customers understand our priorities and how we try to meet community needs. It also helps library employees see how their work fits into the big picture. The plan is a living and flexible blueprint that changes as we evolve. The goals of the plan speak to broad community needs, including basic reading skills for all ages, finding information on current topics, pleasure reading, information-seeking skills using technology, and public spaces where learning and connecting can take place. The strategies needed to achieve these goals will be reviewed annually.

### ***What is the library's mission?***

Multnomah County Library enriches lives by fostering diverse opportunities for all people to read, learn and connect.

Multnomah County Library upholds the principles of intellectual freedom and the public's right to know by providing people of all ages with access and guidance to information and collections that reflect all points of view.

### ***How was the strategic plan developed?***

In 2005, Multnomah County Library convened a 15-member Community Planning Committee representing various stakeholders and constituencies to identify the community's needs and recommend how the library might best help the community meet those needs. The goals of this strategic plan, which were adopted by the Library Advisory Board and then endorsed by Multnomah County's Board of Commissioners in Fiscal Year 2006, are based on the Community Planning Committee's vision.

Multnomah County Library's strategic plan will guide decision-making through 2010.

### ***What are the plan's goals and strategies?***

**Goal 1: People of all ages and backgrounds will find welcoming, inviting neighborhood spaces where they can interact with others and participate in public discussion.**

*To achieve this goal, the library will:*

- Provide convenient open hours at Central and other neighborhood libraries.
- Maintain and develop libraries as community destination spaces.
- Increase availability of Spanish-, Russian-, Vietnamese- and Chinese-speaking staff and/or volunteers at library locations with significant populations of people who speak those languages.
- Augment activities and events focused on issues of community interest and ethnic celebrations in collaboration with community partners.
- Create inviting environments for after-school activities for teens and other young people.
- Tap the energy and life experience of baby boomers and seniors as volunteers and program participants.

**Goal 2: People of all ages and backgrounds will find a wide variety of current and popular materials and programs in the languages they read, speak or understand, to satisfy their personal reading interests and educational needs.**

*To achieve this goal, the library will:*

- Build collections of high-demand popular and informational materials in a wide range of formats and in various languages.
- Implement and enhance book discussion groups, author visits, storytimes, community forums and other opportunities for exploring and learning at all ages.
- Invest in efficient systems to connect people with the materials they request.

**Goal 3: People of all ages and backgrounds will find literature, information and answers to questions related to work, school, cultural, civic and personal life.**

*To achieve this goal, the library will:*

- Offer a collection of general information resources in print, electronic and other formats on a wide variety of topics.
- Help customers locate needed information and materials by organizing materials thoughtfully and designing well-planned online systems for finding and requesting what they seek.
- Enhance staff skills in assisting customers and providing answers to their questions.
- Make the best use of available information technology.

**Goal 4: People of all ages and backgrounds will have the tools and skills to find, evaluate and use information resources that best meet their needs.**

*To achieve this goal, the library will:*

- Offer presentations and training to educators and students to help them choose the best information sources.
- Develop classes and presentations in cooperation with community partners to help older adults, immigrants and others improve their skills and capabilities in using electronic resources.
- Develop and implement online tutorials in using electronic resources.
- Extend staff skills in providing informal information literacy training.

**Goal 5: Babies and preschoolers will have access to a wide variety of early literacy programs and materials; school-age children and teens will have access to reading motivation programs and materials.**

*To achieve this goal, the library will:*

- Teach parents and caregivers ways of reading and interacting with children to prepare babies and preschoolers for reading.
- Support Summer Reading and other programs to develop and maintain reading skills.
- Offer high-interest books and engaging programs to improve reading skills of at-risk young people.

**Goal 6: Adults and families of all ages and backgrounds will have materials and programs to help them reach their personal literacy goals.**

*To achieve this goal, the library will:*

- Support achievement of personal educational goals for adults and families at all levels of educational achievement.
- Offer literacy and English Language Learners materials for adults in multiple library locations.
- Facilitate literacy classes, tutoring connections, and opportunities for English Language Learners to connect through partnerships with other organizations.

**Goal 7: People in Multnomah County will have a public library system supported by stable funding adequate to meet the above goals.**

*To achieve this goal, the library will work with supporters to:*

- Maintain public financial support for Multnomah County Library.
- Determine the feasibility of creating and funding a library district to provide stable funding.
- Support stakeholder groups (such as the Friends of the Library and The Library Foundation) that seek to enhance basic funding for expanded programs and services.

***How will the strategic plan be implemented?***

The seven goals will guide the decisions about developing the library's annual budget and implementing specific projects and initiatives from 2006–2010. During this period, the library will monitor the needs and priorities of our community and adjust our services to meet changing needs. The library's goals connect most directly to the Multnomah County priority areas of "Vibrant Communities" and "Education," but also address other priority areas, including "Thriving Economy" and "Accountability."

The director of Multnomah County libraries has primary responsibility and accountability for leading the effort to address these goal areas, with library staff at all levels making significant contributions. In addition, the Multnomah County Board of Commissioners, who endorsed these strategic goals and who serves as the policy-setting body for the library, has a crucial role to play in adopting policy and providing oversight to the library. The Library Advisory Board, an appointed body that serves in an advisory capacity to the Multnomah County Board of Commissioners as well as the library director, provides regular citizen input into the programs, services and initiatives of the library and has designated Goal 7 as an area of particular focus during the duration of this plan.

Other stakeholder groups, such as the Friends of the Multnomah County Library and The Library Foundation, align their priorities and activities with those of the library and provide valuable input, resources and services in helping the library address these goals.

## **Acknowledgments**

This plan could not have been developed without the dedicated members of the diverse Community Planning Committee, who developed a vision for the community and then identified how the library could address the issues needed to realize that vision. In addition, staff at all levels within Multnomah County Library participated in the planning process.

We want to acknowledge and express our appreciation to all those who contributed to this process, especially the Community Planning Committee, the Library Advisory Board and the Multnomah County Board of Commissioners, who recognize, value and support the library's mission and goals.

### **Multnomah County Board of Commissioners**

Diane Linn, Chair; Maria Rojo de Steffey, District 1; Serena Cruz Walsh, District 2; Lisa Naito, District 3; Lonnie Roberts, District 4.

### **Community Planning Committee**

Serena Cruz Walsh, Amy Fuller, Richard Harris, Kevin Kesckes, Jon Kruse, Ursula LeGuin, Jaime Lim, Wendy Radmacher-Willis, Barbara Rommel, Jane Salisbury, Joan Shipley, Robert Silverman, Andy Smith, Paul Thalhofer and Harold Williams.

### **Library Advisory Board**

Alice Meyer, Chair (2006-2007); Dean Gisvold, Chair (2005-2006); Joe Arellano; Robert Brading; Marian Creamer; Martha Gies; Stephen Feltz; Mark Garber; Molly Gloss; Rick Gustafson; Gwen Farnham Hyland; Virginia Koontz; Jon Kruse; Marneet Lewis; Diane McKeel; Donna Oden-Orr; Diane Xiong.

### **Library Administration**

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### **Staff Strategic Planning Team**

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