



Indianola Public Library Strategic Plan

2020-2025

Mission

We open doors for curious minds.

Vision

The Indianola Public Library anticipates, innovates, and inspires.

Anticipates

We will foster trust and communication to identify the needs, wants, and aspirations of our community.

Innovates

We will experiment and push expectations with programs and services designed for the people we serve.

Inspires

We will encourage discovery, stimulate growth, and cultivate meaningful experiences and relationships.

As one of the oldest public libraries in the State of Iowa, the Indianola Public Library has a proud tradition of serving the community by connecting residents to information and to each other so they can learn, enjoy, and thrive. Indianola's proximity to the metro Des Moines area has prompted a rapidly changing community, and the Library is committed to meeting emerging needs and exceeding community expectations. As part of this endeavor, the Library has developed a five-year Strategic Plan to ensure its relevance with community needs and goals.

Background

The first step in creating this Strategic Plan was researching community demographics. Community statistics are encouraging to the future of the Indianola Public Library. Indianola has a healthy mix of age groups, with the largest group being those age 20-34. This demographic comprises 20% of Indianola's population and 27% of library card holders. The community's educational attainment is good, with 96% having at least a high school degree and 30% with a bachelor's degree or higher. Per capita and household income are on par with the state as a whole.

Other statistics point to areas where the Library needs to make changes in order to meet the community's needs. For example, 77% of residents in the workforce commute to work, but the Library's hours are not compatible with a commuting schedule. In addition, the Indianola Public Library has a smaller building, a smaller staff, and a smaller collection than other libraries in similar sized towns.

The next step in the process was to gather community input by conducting focus groups and gathering opinions through a survey, which reached both library users and residents who don't use the library. After careful consideration of Indianola's demographics and reviewing community input, three clear strategic priorities emerged:

Strategic Priority 1: Improved Spaces

Improving the Library's building was overwhelmingly the largest need identified by the community. There were many comments related to increasing the size of the building, modernizing the furniture, and creating more welcoming spaces. In addition, there is a strong interest in improving the Library's exterior space. Based on this feedback, improving the Library's spaces emerged as the top priority in the next five years.

Strategic Priority 2: Increased Access

Research shows that there has been a steady decline in the number of library card holders over the past 18 years. If the Library will remain a vibrant part of community life, library usage and the number of cardholders needs to increase. Finding ways to reduce barriers to using the Library in order to attract new users is the second strategic priority.

Strategic Priority 3: Increased Awareness

A surprising result from the community survey was that respondents requested services and programs already offered by the Library. Many residents, especially those who are not active library users, are unaware of all that the Library offers them and their community. Increasing the Library's visibility in the community and amplifying awareness of the Library's services and programs is the third strategic priority.

Evaluation

Library staff will review this strategic plan quarterly for progress and the Library Board of Trustees will review progress annually. Qualitative and quantitative data, as well as completion of designated projects, will be used as evaluation tools.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Improved Spaces

Local residents value having a safe, comfortable, and friendly place to go where they can explore ideas, pursue knowledge, practice skills, and connect with others. To this end, the Indianola Public Library is committed to the continuous improvement of the library space.

What we heard:

- “I would like to see [the library] updated with more modern and inviting with spaces for studying and working from home”
- “A more welcoming and modern look would be great.”
- “I would like comfortable chairs and sofas.”
- “I would like a modern building with space for all ages including adults who want to work from the library.”
- The library needs “potential places to sit outside and read or a playground for kids to play on.”
- The library should focus on “updating the facility.”

Over the next five years, the library will:

- Create comfortable, usable spaces.
- Address the technology needs for library users.
- Improve accessibility within the library.
- Design exterior areas which are welcoming, accessible, and usable for the community.

What will this look like?

- More people using the library to relax, learn, and connect to others.
- More people using the library to work and study.
- More people fulfilled by their library experience.

This is how we'll get there:

1. Create comfortable spaces

- Replace outdated furniture with ADA compliant, comfortable seating that is appealing to the population it will serve.
- Install energy-efficient lighting throughout the library to improve visibility.
- Explore options to create separate spaces for quiet work and collaborative work.
- Expand the teen space, improve seating, and renovate it to create a distinct identity within the library.
- Renovate the children's area to inspire learning, promote reading together, and encourage children to actively engage with the space.

2. Address technology needs

- Add workspaces in the adult section by tripling the number of electrical outlets in the adult section.
- Replace furniture with tech-friendly options.
- Replace outdated computers with laptops for flexible use within the library.
- Add a wireless printing option for patrons.

3. Establish exterior spaces that welcome community members to the library

- Explore options to create a main entrance connected to the parking lot.
- Explore options for prominent signage indicating entrances and library hours.
- Explore options for outdoor spaces which encourage community members to linger, such as tables, reading benches, a gazebo, and a children's play area.

Increase Access

The Library will seek to remove the barriers that prevent residents from fully accessing the vast number of library services, programs, and collections available to them. The Library will continue to attract new library users and strengthen patron loyalty by balancing traditional and new collections and services.

What we heard:

- “Add Sunday hours and perhaps Thursday evening hours”
- “SUNDAY HOURS SUNDAY HOURS SUNDAY HOURS”
- “More books for all ages and interests along with other items that can be checked out”
- The library should “increase access to more titles, both digital and paper copy”
- “I would like to see “a bigger selection of books”

Over the next five years, the library will:

- Broaden its appeal to the community.
- Improve patron access to the library.
- Increase hours.
- Refocus policies to ensure they are patron-centric.
- Diversify and strengthen staff knowledge, skills, and abilities.

What will this look like?

- Patrons are empowered to independently and easily use the collection.
- Expanded base of library users.
- Exceptional personal interactions between staff and patrons.
- Engaged staff with clear developmental goals.

This is how we'll get there:

1. Increase the scope of the library's collection

- Create a "library of things" with nontraditional items for checkout.
- Explore new genres to create niche collections.
- Improve collection visibility by adding strategic display areas.

2. Reduce barriers to access

- Expand evening and weekend hours so more people can access the library.
- Explore an alternate structure for the library's fine and fee schedule.
- Conduct a policy audit to update policies to meet the changing library experience.
- Implement a child-centered organization system for the children's library.
- Explore ways to improve findability of materials in the adult sections.

3. Explore new ideas for services and processes

- Designate an annual "How Might We?" staff session using the principles of Service Design to explore creative ways to improve patron experiences.

4. Implement a continuing education program for staff

- Develop and support an ongoing self-directed education program for all staff members.
- Establish an annual staff training day.
- Add a component to the staff education plan designed to educate library staff on how to promote and advocate for the library.

5. Expand strategies for hiring staff with more diversified skills and experiences

- Review job descriptions for each library position to determine if skills listed are consistent with the changing nature of libraries and librarianship.
- Re-evaluate hiring practices and interview techniques.

Create Awareness

As a community-based creativity hub, the public library promotes transformative changes taking place around the world and in our city, yet many people have an outdated perception of what the Library provides. Through increased awareness, residents will discover the ways in which the Library's resources, services, and programs can enrich their lives.

What we heard:

- The 2019 Library Survey captured requests for program and services the Library already offers, indicating that people are unaware of some of the Library's existing programs and services.
- I would like to see "more visual communication for events."
- The library should focus on "getting the word out of what they're doing out there."

Over the next five years, the library will:

- Build community awareness of the services the library offers.
- Build awareness of library values.
- Personalize the library so patrons feel they belong.

What will this look like?

- More library card holders.
- Increased program attendance.
- Increased usage of library services.
- Increased awareness of the value the library brings to Indianola.

This is how we'll get there:

1. Create and carry out an annual strategic marketing communications plan

- Revise and update the marketing guidelines.
- Complete a signage audit to identify inconsistent branding.
- Create a marketing calendar.
- Develop a marketing guide for creating images specifically for certain mediums.

2. Promote the library and library events in the community

- Implement at least one new nontraditional promotion in the community each year, such as lawn signs in high-traffic areas and table tents in local restaurants.
- Implement at least one outreach event each year designed to promote the library.

3. Personalize the Library

- Launch an online campaign to highlight the work staff is doing day-to-day.
- Add a component to the annual marketing plan designed to create awareness of the state of libraries.
- Implement a virtual campaign that incorporates patron feedback to promote library successes.