

CREATING THE FUTURE IN ROCHESTER & MONROE COUNTY



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Responses to A 2020 Vision & Plan for
Library Service in New York State

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Creating the Future in Rochester & Monroe County

RESPONSES TO A 2020 VISION & PLAN FOR LIBRARY SERVICE IN NEWYORK STATE

Rochester Public Library Responses

Recommendation 24: All public libraries to proactively create and collect local content and serve as a catalyst for civic engagement to promote civil discourse and confront society's most difficult problems.

1. Facing Race, Embracing Equity – This is a local initiative designed to facilitate honest conversation in the community around the topic of race. Public libraries in Rochester and Monroe County have been sites for small “Conversations on Race” since 2012 and continue to facilitate this discussion. RPL staff actively participates in the FR-EE initiative, which involves training and discussion. Most recently, RPL staff participated in a three-day training entitled “Culturally Specific Models of Service Delivery and Practice” facilitated by Dr. Joy DeGruy. The training focused on effective approaches for working with African American students and families. As a follow-up, RPL staff members took the training to local recreation center and neighborhood meetings, facilitating discussions which focused on DeGruy’s workshop, specifically on trauma to African-Americans, which DeGruy refers to as “Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome.” Staff facilitated discussions in libraries around the happenings in Ferguson, MO and the 50th anniversary of the July ‘64 race riots in Rochester. Staff posed these questions during the sessions: what to do when you’re stopped by police, what is restorative justice and how do youth and families get trained in this technique? RPL produced a number of activities around the July 64 anniversary, including historic walking tours of the neighborhoods that were the focal point of the riots, and book & film discussions. Staff continues to work with area organizations on restorative justice training, using the multitude of training resources in Rochester around the subject, including the branch libraries in the neighborhoods which provide hubs for training the youth and families in the community in self-empowerment strategies to strengthen the community at large.

Other work being done around the initiative includes:

- a. Family Independence Initiative (Fii) - Coordinated by South West Area Neighborhoods and Grow Green; Financial literacy and savings development program to assist families in moving out of dependence.
- b. “Not in Our Town/Not in Our Schools” (NIOT/NIOS) - Coordinated by Moses Robinson (Rochester Police Department) & FR-EE; Community change model to support ongoing dialogues in communities around areas of difference, diversity, and race.
- c. MJS Productions – Depression Awareness Conference Planning - Event targeting trauma and depression in communities of color. Event occurred October 9-10 and was partnership with MJS Productions and Monroe Community College.

- d. A Call to Women of Color (ACTWOC) - Coordinated by Trillium Health and held on September 20th, event targeted women & girls of color to promote healthy living and AIDS Awareness.
- e. Question Bridge Planning - Coordinated by the Rochester Contemporary Art Center (RoCo), Question Bridge is their featured exhibit running 6 weeks from October – November, showcasing black men.
- f. Inter-Agency Taskforce on Combating Racism – Staff serving on this community committee.

Recommendation 25: Collaboration with other libraries and community organizations to develop seamless information literacy initiatives, promote cultural understanding, and protect local historical and cultural treasures.

1. Social Security Information Kiosk - The Social Security Administration (SSA) recently announced it will stop providing benefit verification letters in their offices in the near future, and that applicants will need an e-mail account to have these documents sent to them. To help applicants adjust to this change, SSA has created a new program called “Social Security Express,” featuring a kiosk that can be used in remote locations to contact SSA. The Central Library of Rochester & Monroe County is one of six sites nationally to offer this service. The Express kiosk will allow easy touchscreen or keyboard access to a number of key SSA eService applications, including remote videoconferencing with SSA agent support, printing statements or other documents, creating Social Security account, and more.
2. Al-Mutanabbi Street Starts Here – In 2006, Al-Mutanabbi Street, the street of booksellers in Baghdad, was destroyed by a suicide bomber. The attack tore through the heart of Baghdad’s historic literary district, a block filled with cafés and bookstores. The Shahbandar coffeehouse, a meeting place for generations of Iraqi writers and intellectuals, was blown to pieces; the owner’s four sons and one grandson were killed. Thirty people died and 100 were wounded in the blast, for which no group ever claimed responsibility. A world away, a San Francisco bookseller read about the attack in his morning paper. Beau Beausoleil, a poet and proprietor of the Great Overland Book Company, waited for the outpouring of support and outrage that would surely follow. Nothing happened. Mr. Beausoleil felt compelled to act and began an art and writing project called “Al-Mutanabbi Streets Starts Here” to express solidarity with Iraqi booksellers, writers, and readers. The project began with a first wave of letterpress broadsides and evolved to include an anthology of writing and more than 260 artist books. The broadsides and artist books were brought to Rochester in June 2014 for a two-month long event that included lectures on topics such as Cultural Conversations with Poetry, World Wednesdays, which featured programs around a different culture every week at the Central Library, and lectures and discussions including religious leaders representing the Jewish, Christian, Islamic, and Buddhist faiths gathered for discussions.
3. Rochester Voices – In 2012, the RPL received a grant of \$319,000 from the Gleason Foundation to begin a new digitization project called “Rochester Voices.” This project has collected, digitized, and interpreted materials from the RPL collection that have “voices,” such as letters, diaries, music, and oral histories. The project, led by Rochester City Historian and RPL Director of Historical Resources Christine Ridarsky, will be released in early 2015, and is the product of a significant partnership between the RPL and Social Studies teachers and students from the Rochester City School District who assisted in selecting and interpreting the materials. The website features a section specifically designed to support local history social studies research by providing primary source materials online. In addition, the site will offer an original, interactive “hidden object” game designed by students at the Rochester Institute of Technology.

Recommendation 26: Support state and national digital literacy learning initiatives providing this 21st century skill to people of all walks of life, not just those enrolled in schools and colleges.

1. Computer Aide Title – The need for one-to-one computer assistance has grown exponentially in our libraries, prompting the development of a new position, Computer Aide, which will work exclusively with patrons needing assistance. We expect to fund up to three positions in the 2015-16 budget request. This position is a “sister” to a Literacy Aide title created in 2008, which provides assistance to children needing homework and reading help in the libraries. Candidates for both positions are drawn from the neighborhoods where libraries are located whenever possible, providing a secure, well-paying job for city residents.
2. Edge Benchmarks – RPL participated in the Edge Benchmark initiative, which helped identify areas that need work and areas where RPL is succeeding. Organizational management is an area that we are working to improve with a wholesale review of policies and procedures in process.

Recommendation 27: The provision of robust early childhood education programs and the provision of homework assistance as a core service; the alignment of outreach services with societal priorities, such as teen services and gang prevention.

1. National League of Cities Grant – In 2013-14, RPL Director Uttaro led a grant from the National League of Cities around Early Education Alignment for Young Children. This grant addressed five specific goals for Rochester: research into principles and practices of authentic, transformative family engagement; developmental screenings for 3 year olds; researching alternative financing mechanisms for funding early education; aligning the curriculum and professional development between PreK and K; and aligning and improving summer learning. This grant culminated in a statewide summit on October 30 that brought together educators, government officials, and early learning advocates from all over the country to discuss these issues.
2. Early Learning & PreK – RPL Director Uttaro served on Rochester Mayor Lovely Warren’s Early Learning Council in 2014, which was convened to research the state of learning opportunities for young children in the City of Rochester. The ELC held public hearings, performed research, and produced a report that made recommendations for City of Rochester action. Libraries play a significant role in the delivery of early learning in Rochester, which has been recognized by Mayor Warren in her “3 to 3” initiative. In addition, RPL piloted a preschool at the Maplewood Branch from January-June 2014. The pilot was successful in many ways, and RPL is now searching for funds to replicate the preschool at other branches.
3. Summer Reading Camps – In Summer 2014, the RPL piloted six directed summer reading camps at six branch libraries. These camps were funded by the Rochester City School District and taught by certified teachers. The camps provided a richer, more specific reading experience than the usual drop-in summer reading program, and included pre- and post-testing to allow us to determine if participation in the program prevented the “summer slide” and increased the reading skills of participants. While the enrollment was not as high as RPL would have liked due to a late start to the program, the results from the 389 children who participated were excellent. All but two showed an increase in reading comprehension skills, or their skill stayed the same. Plans are underway to replicate the program in 2015.

4. Literacy Aides – This title was created in 2008 in response to the tremendous need for homework and reading assistance for children after school. The positions are filled with high-performing high school or college students from the branch library neighborhoods, who work with children on homework, reading, math, etc. every day after school. In the summer of 2014, the Rochester City School District funded 21 temporary positions, which were deployed to the branches to assist with summer programming. These 21 teens recorded nearly 20,000 contacts with younger children in July and August, with 26% of their time in direct support of the summer reading camps, and another 45% of their time associated with activities that require reading skills. These young people serve as role models to the younger children in the neighborhoods, and provide an invaluable service to the city.
5. Ready to Read at New York Libraries – RPL and the Monroe County Library System both actively support and participate in this project. RPL/MCLS Director Uttaro sits on the advisory board for the project, and three RPL/MCLS children’s librarians are members of the training cohort.
6. Safe to Be Smart – The Safe to Be Smart program was created in 2001 at the Arnett Branch of the Rochester Public Library in response to large numbers of teens coming to the library and causing disruptions to service. Rather than toss them out of the library, a Youth Services Coordinator was hired to engage the teens. Since that time, STBS has expanded to 6 sites and serves close to 1,000 teens every day. The Youth Services workers engage the teens in activities such as STEM, poetry, performance, job searching, college readiness, field trips and more with the ultimate goal of showing the teens that there is more to life than what they see in their neighborhoods. The program got its name from a young woman who told the Youth Coordinator that the library was a place where it was “safe to be smart.” The STBS staff regularly works with teens on gang intervention and social-emotional issues as well as academic issues.
7. ImagineYou – As an outgrowth of the STBS program at the Rochester Central Library, a MacArthur/IMLS grant funded a digital learning lab project in 2012 which we call ImagineYOU. This lab is equipped with state of the art music, video, and animation equipment, and mentors regularly work with the teens to create music videos, documentaries, graphic novels, and more.
8. Greater Rochester Teen Book Festival and Teen Read Week – Area teen librarians created these two incredible events. The Teen Book Festival draws crowds in the thousands from all over the United States and Canada, including teens from Rochester and its surrounding towns. The ImagineYOU teens created a documentary of the 2014 TBF which will be available online shortly. The Greater Rochester Teen Read Week is yet another way our creative teen staff engage teens with reading and books.

Recommendation 29: Investment in public library facilities in order to be able to respond to the changing needs of communities – rewiring of older buildings, creation of larger meeting spaces and small meeting rooms, flexible storage solutions so that libraries can adjust as print to e-format ratios change and energy efficiency improvements to keep operating costs down.

1. Solar at Arnett – The Arnett Branch of the RPL is our first solar powered location. To capitalize on this unique feature, students from Rochester Institute of Technology were engaged to create a working miniature model that explains how solar energy works. Arnett has become a focal point in the neighborhood for the green movement, hosting many programs on green energy and reducing your carbon footprint. Arnett has also focused on health and urban farming in the last few years, acting as a pick up site for a local CSA, and taking the library to the Westside Farmers market every week from May-October.

2. Central Master Space Plan – The Central Library has undergone a review of services, priorities, and space since 2011, resulting in a four-phase master space plan. The first phase of the plan has been completed, with the opening of the Reynolds Media Center in mid-October. The RMC brings together all media (except children’s) in one flexible space that can easily be adapted as physical media diminishes. Alongside traditional media such as DVDs, audiobooks, and music CDs, the RMC offers a laptop bar, digital download stations, and a gadget bar featuring Google Glass, Finch robots, multiple types of tablets and e-readers, and much more for patrons and staff to try out and experiment. The second phase will create an Arts & Literature floor in the historic Rundel Memorial Building, which will feature spaces for an Artist-in-Residence and a Writer-in-Residence, which will support a focus on using the collections to make things. The Literature staff is focusing heavily on self-publishing, having produced a very successful Self-Published Author Festival in February 2014 and having just won a grant to produce another Festival in 2015. More than 100 local authors applied to participate in the 2014 festival.
3. Facility Modernization Program at Highland – The RPL continues to participate in the Rochester City School District Facility Modernization Plan, and has succeeded in acquiring additional space at the School 12 site which includes the Highland Branch and a City Recreation Center. The Highland Branch will gain an additional 800 square feet in meeting space during the construction phase in 2015-16. RPL continues to evaluate with the RCSD other sites that would be suitable for a combined public library-school-recreation center campus as exists at the Thomas P. Ryan Community Center in the Northeast part of Rochester.

Monroe County Library System Responses

Recommendation 34: Increasing and providing incentives for collaboration among systems and with the New York State Library, as well as with other state agencies.

1. Staff Development with Pioneer Library System – The MCLS and PLS have successfully collaborated on two notable projects in 2013-14: Emerging Leaders and Teen Services training. The Emerging Leaders training is a highly competitive, focused 3-day course led by Jerry Nichols for 12 participants from each system. Nichols works through an agenda that is packed with information necessary for staff to become leaders in their field. It has been a true success, not only in exposing new and upcoming leaders to relevant, important information, but also allowing them to make connections with each other. In addition to the Emerging Leaders training, MCLS and PLS have collaborated on a series of training webinars for teen services librarians through YALSA., funded through a Harold Hacker Grant for the Advancement of Libraries.
2. Rochester Area Library System Directors – RPL/MCLS Director Uttaro is a member of the Rochester Area Library System Directors Council, which meets regularly at the Rochester Regional Library Council offices. RRLC Executive Director Kathy Miller leads the group, which includes directors from public systems (MCLS and PLS) and school systems (BOCES I and II, Wayne-Finger Lakes, and Genesee Valley BOCES, and RCSD). The group primarily addresses advocacy, and has been responsible for very successful Legislative Breakfasts in the Rochester region, attended by more than 100 legislators, trustees, and staff. This table has led to a much greater collaboration throughout the systems.

3. Ready to Read at New York Libraries - RPL and the Monroe County Library System both actively support and participate in this project. RPL/MCLS Director Uttaro sits on the advisory board for the project, and three RPL/MCLS children's librarians are members of the training cohort.

Recommendation 35: An environment of flexible, regional solutions without loss of state funding.

1. Empire Shared Collection – In 2014, the MCLS entered into an agreement with the University at Buffalo to become part of their Empire Shared Collection project. ESC is located at the UB North Campus and is a collection of materials that will be kept and maintained by UB for a 30 year period. Members of the ESC have access to the collection, currently composed of serials but with plans to expand to monographs as well. The value for MCLS is at the Central Library level, where reorganization and master space plan activities involved a deep dive into the collections. As a result of joining ESC, the RPL/MCLS Central Library no longer has to keep periodicals that are held in the ESC collection. The Central Library will, eventually, become a holdings partner, where unique materials in our collection will be made available through the ESC. Membership in the ESC has allowed the Central Library to remove hundreds of unused periodicals from dusty, dirty storage areas, freeing up space for infrequently used materials to come off the public shelves, thus creating more space for other types of public space use. The process works like this: a patron makes a request for an article held at UB. The request is mediated by an ILL staff member and sent to UB. Staff at UB retrieve the periodical, scan the desired article and email it to the patron. The process does work. Recently, a patron made a request for an article from a periodical no longer in the Central collection. The request was made at 10:00 am, sent to UB, and the patron had the article by 2:30 pm that same day. MCLS is very pleased with the project so far and is eager to see it expand.

Recommendation 36: Library systems to be at the forefront of training, professional development, technological innovation, outreach, marketing and branding, and other high-value services needed by member libraries.

1. Emerging Technology Committee – The MCLS convened an Emerging Technology Committee in 2006, which meets monthly and produces quarterly tech Camps on topics of interest to library staff. Recent topics have included augmented reality, big data, Minecraft, online gaming, accessible hardware and software, technology in story times, and much more. This committee brings information about new technology to MCLS staff months, sometimes years, before it becomes mainstream. At the same time, they think creatively about how that technology could be used in libraries and presents that information to staff as well. The ESC has also been responsible for bringing speakers such as Michael Stephens, Stephen Abram, and Rob & Kim Bolan-Cullin.
2. Beta testing web-based circ – The MCLS has completed beta testing a new product from our ILS vendor – TLC - that is a web-based circulation system. The beta testing is complete and staff are now able to use the product on tablets and other portable devices, allowing them to bring the catalog and staff client to patrons anywhere inside or outside the library.
3. Pop-Up Libraries – Several MCLS libraries have been taking “pop-up” libraries on the road to various events and locations in their service areas. The Rochester Public Library regularly shows up at the Rochester Public Market and other farmers markets in the city, while other libraries, like the Henrietta Public Library, are popping up at ice cream stands, parks, malls, and festivals.

4. Marketing & Communications – The MCLS engaged the Ad Council of Rochester to perform a Brand workshop and Communications Audit for the system in 2012-13. This work has resulted in a communications and marketing plan that is being developed with a team of system members. This plan includes the development of a new website and a set of best practices for members. In addition, MCLS has secured a subscription to Constant Contact, and online newsletter product, for use by every member library.

For more information on anything in this report, please contact Patricia Uttaro at puttaro@libraryweb.org or 585-428-8045.