



**CLEVELAND PUBLIC LIBRARY STRATEGIC PLAN 2012-2019**

THE FUTURE STARTS WITH YOU



*“No live organization can remain static.”*

Linda Eastman, CPL Director 1918-1938

In the long history of the Cleveland Public Library, the high points have far outnumbered the low. But if we are to understand how the Library came to be the respected cultural institution it is today, we cannot shy away from examining those low points in its evolution.

One might expect those low points to have occurred during times of financial hardship, or during times of great social upheaval. But that has not been the case. In fact, the Library flourished during some of the most difficult periods in our community’s history. The low points were not the result of external forces bearing down upon the Library; they were, in fact, brought on internally.

Whenever the Library isolated itself from the community it is mandated to serve, the Library weakened itself. Whenever the Library stopped taking risks, the Library stunted its own progress. Whenever the Library rested on its laurels, the Library caused its relevance to be called into question.

Today, we are tempted to hunker down and wait out the nation’s continuing fiscal crisis. We are tempted to stop taking risks and not start any new initiatives. We are tempted to say that what we are doing is good enough because we cannot afford to do more.

We are tempted, but not persuaded.

Certainly, times are tough. It is said that the Great Recession has given way to the “Great Unknown.” But this is also time of unparalleled opportunity for a public library to integrate itself even more fully into the life of the community it serves.

Our community—like many others—is suffering from unemployment, low graduation rates, poor nutrition, inadequate healthcare, and crime. Our prospects can seem bleak.

But there is hope for a better Cleveland. In addition to the official strategies to achieve a high performing sustainable economy for all, there are thousands of informal, innovative experiments happening all over the city by inspired and creative people from all walks of life.

What they lack is a place where they can connect with each other, learn from each other, build energy around their projects, and share their ideas with the larger community, bringing more people into the community of innovation and change.

The Library should be and can be that place, that center of learning for the whole community. That is our mission. But we cannot fulfill that mission if we remain static. This Strategic Plan is a direct challenge to complacency.

Our future starts with you. We are depending on you to help us be the library you need us to be.

Felton Thomas, Jr.



*We actively embrace new ways to adapt the Library to the changing needs of the people we serve.*

## Our Vision

Cleveland Public Library will be the driving force behind a powerful culture of learning that will inspire Clevelanders from all walks of life to continually learn, share and seek out new knowledge in ways that are beneficial to themselves, their community and the world.

## Our Mission

We are the “People’s University,” the center of learning for a diverse and inclusive community.

## Guiding Principles

We provide equal access to a vast range of information and resources.

We actively embrace new ways to adapt the Library to the changing needs of the people we serve.

We offer collections that are of interest to our users in ways that are most convenient for them.

We are passionate about providing library service to our community.

We conduct all interactions with respect and can be counted on to do the right thing in a fair and equitable manner.

## Our Identity

We are not a typical public library!

We take great pride in being Cleveland’s public library.

We are the heart of CLEVNET, the best example of regional collaboration in Ohio.

We are a public library for Ohio, providing library services statewide through the Ohio Library for the Blind and Physically Disabled, virtual reference services, and the sharing of our collections.

We are part of the global library community, learning from and sharing with our counterparts around the world.

## Our Strategic Priorities

Form communities of learning

Fight community deficits

Ready for the future: CPL150

Cultivate a global perspective

Innovate for efficient and sustainable operations





*Cleveland Public Library will be the driving force behind a powerful culture of learning that will inspire Clevelanders from all walks of life to continually learn, share and seek out new knowledge in ways that are beneficial to themselves, their community and the world.*

We share in the vision of a sustainable Cleveland transformed by the collective impact of determined people and organizations working together to make Cleveland better educated, healthier, safer, and more prosperous.

Our role in this transformation is the work we do at the center of the city's culture of learning.

What is a culture of learning and why is it important? "A culture of learning inspires continuous identification and mastery of new thoughts and skills for all people in society, throughout all of life's phases, yielding a population more agile and able to evolve. A culture of learning is important to foster innovation, ability to adapt to new technologies and processes, and to identify shifts in society, environment and economics."<sup>1</sup>

As a community's culture of learning becomes more powerful, it begins to erode the community's deficits. As the deficits erode, more people are free to actively participate in the culture of learning, bringing with them their unique experiences, backgrounds, abilities, interests, and perspectives.

This culture of learning extends far beyond Cleveland and connects people to every corner of the globe. We believe that people are most empowered when they can identify themselves as global citizens with responsibilities to each other and to the Earth itself.

<sup>1</sup> Sustainable Cleveland 2019 Action & Resources Guide, 2010.







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We are not a typical public library. Perhaps we would be if a particular book collector had not changed the course of our history.

John Griswold White (1845-1928) began donating his personal collection of books to the Library while he served on the Board of Trustees. He shared his books with the people of Cleveland with the desire that they should develop an understanding of world cultures, especially those largely ignored—or worse—trivialized by Western educators: the cultures of Asia, the Middle East, and Africa.

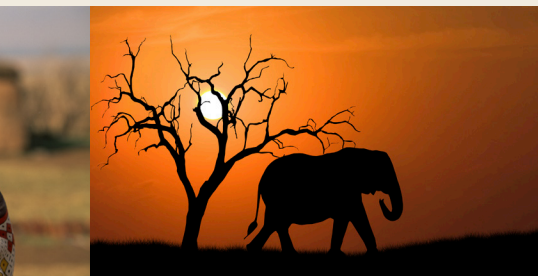
The books he donated and the endowment that followed after his death shaped the development of the Library’s collections and its mission of service to the people of Cleveland.

Mr. White knew that, for many Clevelanders, the opportunities for learning began and ended at the public library. Today, that is still the case. We are the closest experience to a university that many people have.

At the same time, formally educated people continue their learning here, using resources not normally found at a public library. Whether someone is working on a PhD or a GED, we are here to help them reach their goals.

We are careful not to underestimate people. A person’s capacity for learning is only limited by their learning environment.

At the “People’s University,” we strive to provide an environment for learning that limits no one and includes everyone.







We provide equal access to a vast range of information and resources for learning.

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*We take great pride in being  
Cleveland's public library.*

### **We are not a typical public library!**

We have manuscripts hand-penned by monks in 14<sup>th</sup> century France as well as the latest bestsellers. With something for everyone, we prove that a public library can successfully provide the best of both worlds—research collections and popular collections—to its users. It's not an "either/or" for us. We simply don't like to see limits on where learning might take someone!

And with the largest chess collection in the world, you can be sure we believe in play!<sup>2</sup>

### **We take great pride in being Cleveland's public library.**

Cleveland is in our name and at the core of who we are. We are part of the fabric of this amazing city. The city defines us and we help define the city and its neighborhoods.

Everything we do outside of Cleveland allows the rest of the world to discover and appreciate what Cleveland has to offer.

### **We are the heart of CLEVNET, the best example of regional collaboration in Ohio.**

CLEVNET is 37 libraries and growing. And no wonder. The return on investment for participating libraries is conservatively estimated at \$6 for every dollar invested.

Most people think CLEVNET is about sharing books and other materials, but that's just one of the benefits. As we celebrate CLEVNET's remarkable 30 years of library cooperation in 2012, we welcome more of our region's libraries to learn about CLEVNET. Help us imagine what can be next! How can we take our collaborative enterprise to the next level?

### **We are a public library for Ohio, providing library services statewide through the Ohio Library for the Blind & Physically Disabled, virtual reference services, and the sharing of our collections.**

We serve fellow Ohioans who live far from Cleveland in places like Portsmouth, Chillicothe, and Lima. They are readers—14,000 strong—who receive Braille, audio materials and electronic talking books. Our partnership with the State Library of Ohio, makes it possible for us to reach Ohioans in every one of our state's 88 counties.

And not just through OLBPD. We also administer Ohio's virtual reference service *KnowItNow24x7*, and share our collections statewide.

### **We are part of the global library community, learning from and sharing with our counterparts around the world.**

Public libraries vary greatly from nation to nation around the globe. But our work—wherever we are—is rooted in service.

Appreciation for a common mission and the desire to find new and better ways to serve our users, brings us together in a community of learning.

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<sup>2</sup> "Many historic collections of books have been concerned with the record of human misery, anguish and woe. They have recorded war and human destruction. Mr. White's collection was concerned not with these things, with 'battles long ago'; but with the brightening and refreshment of the human spirit; it concerns the history of leisurely, restful and sedentary play." From the valuation of John G. White's Chess Collection, by Thomas J. Holmes, October 22, 1928.

## To realize our vision

of a Cleveland transformed by a vibrant culture of learning, we will focus our energy and resources on five key areas:

Form Communities of Learning

Fight Community Deficits

Ready for the Future: CPL150

Cultivate a Global Perspective

Innovate for Efficient and Sustainable Operations



### Form Communities of Learning

Collectively, all the services and resources offered by the Library—those based in its buildings, those offered virtually, and those offered on wheels—make Cleveland Public Library *the* center of learning for our whole community.

At the same time, wherever our users gather—online or in person—they should have the capacity to form communities of learning that benefit themselves and influence the world around them.

Our new Rice Branch is a good example of a learning community in formation. Located next to a public elementary school, Rice Branch is where the people of the Buckeye neighborhood are coming to learn. It is a place for reading, tutoring, GED classes, and computer instruction. Based on its success, the Cleveland Foundation is generously funding similar initiatives at six additional neighborhood libraries in 2012.

Rice Branch is a success, but it is just the start of what a learning community can be. At the next level, the people of Buckeye will be learning together from each other, united in common concerns and shared aspirations. Their learning experiences will benefit them personally and impact the community for the better.

As communities of learning are formed at sites across the city and online, they will attract more members and they will soon be sources of action. A community of people actively engaged in meaningful, lifelong learning will not accept that things cannot get better. They will be believers in transformation because they will have experienced it firsthand.

### Fight Community Deficits

Cleveland has more than its share of deficits standing in the way of its transformation to a healthy, educated, safe and prosperous city. Can communities of learning really have an impact on these deficits and change things for the better?

Ask the thousands of Cuyahoga County residents, who worked together for months in an open and honest dialogue to identify the social issues of greatest concern in our county. They identified education, jobs, healthcare, criminal justice and sustainable food as their most pressing concerns.<sup>3</sup>

As a community of learning, they believe study and conversation can inspire people to use their collective power to create a different future, a future with a healthy ecosystem, healthy social structures, and positive economic outcomes.

A community of learning starts with information to understand the roots of the current reality. The members create a discussion forum—onsite or online—to gather the information they need to inspire action and take action. Together, they figure out how to apply the information in their lives.

But first, a community has to come together. The Library is perfectly situated to help form these communities. We are in the business of making connections. We are also in the business of providing information, resources for sharing information, and the physical and virtual spaces for people to come together.

<sup>3</sup> Greater Cleveland Congregations (GCC), is a new interfaith coalition of more than 40 religious congregations in Cuyahoga County.



**Ready for the Future: CPL150**

We have a party to get ready for! In 2019, the Library will celebrate 150 years of service to the people of Cleveland.

But there will be no point in celebrating if we are looked at nostalgically as a relic of yesteryear, and not contributing any public value to our community.

If we are to be—in 2019—what our users and our CLEVNET partners will need us to be . . . we have to get ready now!

That means engaging our community in substantive conversations about our service model, the changing demographics of the city, our fiscal situation, and the condition of our buildings.

What should the Library's neighborhood presence look like in 2019? Does every service outlet need to provide the same services? Can we design services and service delivery systems that are customized to individual neighborhoods, based on local need?

Phase 1 of the Main Library consolidation plan is underway with the construction of Tech Central. Going forward, how do we design the remaining spaces to meet the needs of the user in 2019?

Our brick-and-mortar future will have to be discussed in the context of an increasingly virtual and mobile world. And the conversations will have to include those who use our libraries and those who do not. In the evolving digital environment, we can expect to lose some long-time library users and gain new ones.

We also have to look at the future of mobile services. Will the bookmobile as we know it be viable in 2019?

In the age of ebooks, widespread mobile connectivity, and growing digital collections, what will the Library need to acquire for our users? How will we connect our users with the resources they need? What will we need to store and where?

At present, we have more questions than answers. But there are a few things we can get started on now, that will get us on the right path, including: researching how user needs and expectations are shifting;<sup>4</sup> transforming the user experience; experimenting with gamification; and expanding our digitization program.

**Cultivate a Global Perspective**

The last will and testament of the greatest benefactor in the Library's history contains a surprising directive. John Griswold White clearly states that the Library is to provide Clevelanders with the opportunity to "acquaint themselves, as nearly first hand as may be" with non-European peoples: "their history, religion, customs, manners and modes of thought, and their literature."

What's surprising is that his will was written in 1928. At that time (and still today to a lesser extent), most of what people knew about other cultures was through the filter of Western academics, adventurers, and travelers. The idea that people should have "first hand" engagement was incredibly progressive at that time.

The Library continues to honor Mr. White's legacy, connecting people to each other so they can learn "first hand" from each other and come to appreciate the variety and richness of the world's cultures. Emerging technology presents us with new avenues to broaden the opportunities for intercultural engagement.

Our global perspective also encompasses environmental sustainability and stewardship. Together, culture and environment form the context in which we learn and interact.

**Innovate for Efficient and Sustainable Operations**

Northeast Ohio residents, through civic engagement projects and public opinion polls, have made it clear that more efficient, effective local government is a top priority for our region.

The Library agrees and with a new Chief Operations Officer in charge, work is underway. Operational goals are now submitted annually and reviewed quarterly. Lean Six Sigma tools are being used to improve our processes. Innovative ideas to improve operations are solicited from staff. The Sustainability Team<sup>5</sup> creates goals and objectives for a greener library system.

But there's more to be done. The Library will continue to improve all aspects of its internal operations, with special focus on how we acquire, use, share and store information.

We are a taxpayer supported organization. We never forget that. We have a duty to make the best use of tax dollars by operating in the most innovative, efficient and sustainable ways possible in support of our Mission.

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<sup>4</sup> Over the next three years, new research by the Pew Internet & American Life Project, supported by a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, will investigate the role of libraries in the digital age, focusing on the ways libraries serve their users and their communities. We will follow the research closely and use it to inform our conversations with our community.

<sup>5</sup> In September 2011, the five staff members on CPL's Sustainability Team graduated from the E4S Sustainability Implementation Group Program, an 8-month, action-driven, peer-based learning process.



*At Cleveland Public Library,  
we value research and  
strive to make decisions  
based on the best data and  
information available.*

### Choose the Best Ideas

This plan is intended to provide a strategic framework to guide future actions in a rapidly changing environment. It allows for the dynamic development of specific projects and initiatives—in support of the five strategic priorities—as conditions change and opportunities emerge.

As ideas for projects and initiatives are brought to the table for consideration, they will be evaluated on a number of different factors, including:

**Alignment:** How does this idea align with initiatives in progress at the city, county, or state level, led by other organizations or government?

**Collective impact:** Instead of operating in a silo, can we add our resources and expertise to work already underway for a greater collective impact?

**Collaboration:** Does this idea allow for collaboration with other organizations to reach more people at a lower cost?

**Sustainability:** Is this idea sustainable from both a fiscal standpoint and an environmental one?

**Measurement:** How will we measure the success of the work if this idea is implemented? Can we measure outcomes as well as outputs?

**Innovation:** Will this project spur new thinking that can benefit our community?

**Technology:** Does this idea incorporate technology in ways that will deepen the level of engagement?

**Inclusiveness:** Has consideration been given to reaching out to the entire community?

**User experience:** Will people be engaged in ways that are convenient and pleasant?

**Play:** Can this idea be brought into a current or future gamification projects?

### Make Decisions Based on Data

At Cleveland Public Library, we value research and strive to make decisions based on the best data and information available. To that end, in preparation for this strategic plan, the Library contracted with researchers at Cleveland State University to prepare two reports:

*Fiscal Review of the Cleveland Public Library*, prepared by a team of researchers at the Center for Public Management at the College of Urban Affairs, includes a review of peer libraries in Ohio and across the nation (January 2012).

*Demographic/Socioeconomic Conditions & Patron Borrowing Analysis of Cleveland Public Library* prepared by research team at the Northern Ohio Data Information Service (NODIS) incorporating library usage data with the latest Census data (January 2012).

The Library will make good use of the research from CSU as it engages the community in discussion about the future of library services at the neighborhood level as part of the CPL150 strategic priority.



We will also be sharing with our neighborhood communities another important study: the physical assessment of branch facilities owned by the Library, completed December 2011. The assessment by the architectural firm of Westlake Reed Leskosky provides a detailed analysis of each branch building.

As we move forward with the strategic priorities to form communities of learning and fight community deficits, we will need a greater level of collaboration and communication with the schools in Cleveland. In anticipation of this, the Library contracted with Synchronicity Consulting to work with the school districts and our staff to prepare an education agenda for library staff to follow.

The Inclusion and Community Engagement ad hoc committee of the Board, made up of trustees and staff, met throughout 2011. The group's final report, *Leveraging Our Differences: Diversity & Inclusion Plan for a Sustainable Future* (December 2011) provides valuable direction and ties directly to the Library's mission.

Additional research will be done as needed, including research by staff members who will have the opportunity to present white papers on emerging topics.

### Measure Impact

How will we know if we are achieving our desired outcomes and making any impact on our community? We will use three levels of measurement to track progress.

First, on a macro level, there are a number of existing indicators that measure the economic, social and environmental health of the city and region; these

are detailed in the *SC2019 Action & Resources Guide*. Second, to evaluate our progress on the five strategic priorities, the Knowledge Office will be responsible for establishing metrics that can be reported monthly to the Leadership Team and the Board. Third, individual projects and initiatives in support of the strategic priorities will be evaluated per measurements established during the idea vetting process.

### Restructure to do the Work

No live organization can remain static. We will restructure the organization as needed to do the work at hand, adapt to changing conditions, create greater efficiencies, and respond to emergent opportunities.

### Celebrate Success

Celebrations are an opportunity to communicate our message, reinvigorate each other, and ignite innovative thinking.

In the years to come, we will be celebrating Cleveland's progress toward a sustainable economy, starting in 2012 with a community-wide celebration of Local Food.

In 2012, we will celebrate CLEVNET's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary. It's our chance to showcase the power of collaboration, acknowledge everyone responsible for CLEVNET's remarkable success, and imagine how CLEVNET can become even more dynamic and innovative in the future.

Throughout, we will keep our eyes on 2019, and the incredible celebration we want to have when the Library turns 150. Think **CPL150** every day!

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**Visit**

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to find more information on each of the Strategic Priorities  
and the actions we are taking in support of them.

