

A STRONG COUNTY SYSTEM SUPPORTING LOCAL NEEDS

Sonoma County residents played an important role in shaping the recommendations of the Facilities Master Plan. In developing a facility plan for the future, the Sonoma County Library made a commitment to seek input from residents throughout the planning process. Over 2,500 residents participated through surveys, focus groups and workshops.

The public provided information on local needs now and in the future, and offered comments on recommendations throughout the master plan.

Community Leadership, Patron and Staff Participation in the Facility Master Plan

A. Strategic Visioning Workshop

On October 30th, 2002, community leaders, library planning professionals and staff gathered to participate in an all day workshop on library needs and the future of libraries in Sonoma County. The participants included representatives from County government, from each of the incorporated cities within Sonoma County, and from the media as well as educators, students and representatives from community and regional organizations throughout the County.

Workshop participants explored ideas about what Sonoma County will be like in the year 2025, what the library could be in the future, and what the library should be in the future. Participants described a future with increased population and ethnic and economic diversity. The library was viewed as a cultural center for communities that offers expanded services for a wide variety of residents. Libraries should make full use of technology but still have areas that support library and community service needs such as exhibit spaces, homework centers, performance areas and even cafes.

B. Patron Survey

Over 2,100 survey forms, in both English and Spanish, were distributed to library users throughout Sonoma County. The survey responses indicate that while library users value greatly the library system, there are needs that they would like to see addressed.

The ‘helpful staff’ and ‘convenient location’ were identified as the most favored attributes of the library. When patrons were asked what needed to be improved, the top answer was the collections, by a 3:1 margin — an important issue, given that 87% stated that they come to the library to use the collections. Half of the respondents indicated that they had to wait to access the materials or services they were looking for.

Patrons also indicated that the services they would most like to see added to the library are the people-centered uses such as a homework center, technology center, and self-checkout stations.

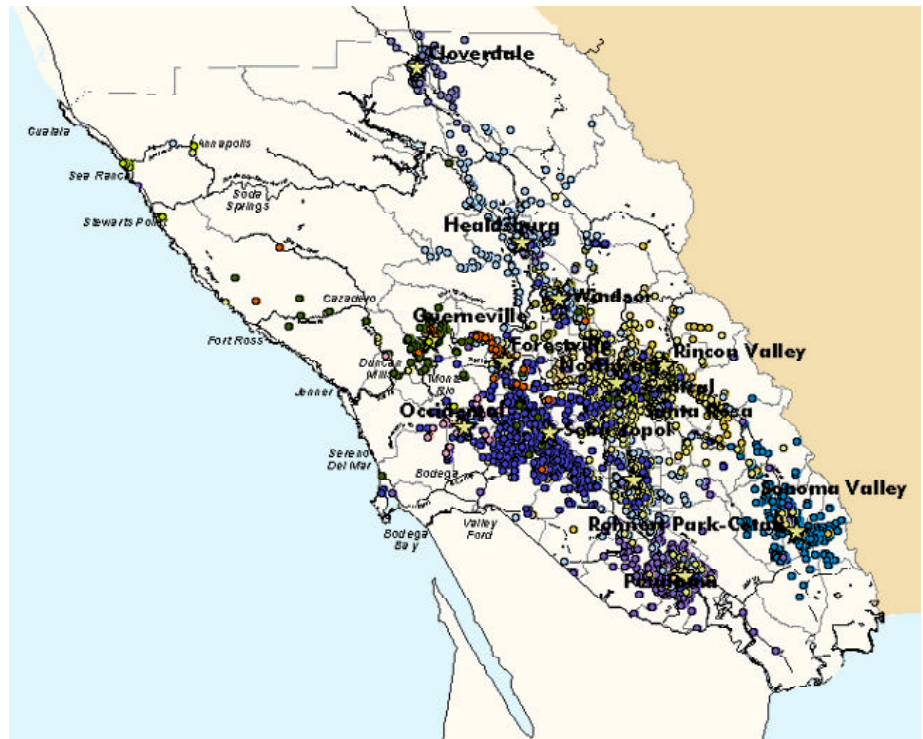


*Sonoma County Library
Strategic Visioning Workshop*

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C. Patron Mapping

In order to understand which libraries Sonoma County residents use, the Library generated a random sample of 8,500 library users. These were mapped using GIS software to indicate the branch each patron visited. The results helped to define service areas. In addition, mapping of users showed that many residents use more than one branch. It also showed areas of Sonoma County without sufficient access to library services.



D. Focus Groups

Focus groups were conducted at several locations in the county to listen to library service ideas and concerns of populations. Focus groups were held for parents of elementary school children, teenagers, literacy students, residents of Bodega Bay, and Spanish speaking adults.

Participants at the Bodega Bay focus group emphasized the need to bring library services out to the coast. They also believed a library in their community could be the ‘focal point’ they have long desired. A potential partnership with the local grade school or community center was mentioned as a possibility.

A focus group with Spanish speaking adults was held at the Petaluma Regional Library. Participants expressed a great desire for services to be made more accessible to Spanish-speaking people. A broader Spanish language collection with materials at all reading levels would allow families to read and learn English together. More materials should also emphasize

the cultural history and traditions of Spanish speaking cultures. Additional computers were requested, as the current 30 minute time limits are not long enough for people who are not fluent in English. Tutoring and homework programs are important for students whose non-English speaking parents cannot provide assistance at home. More outreach is needed to make the library accessible to the estimated 90% to 95% of the Hispanic/Latino community not using the library. Two measures that participants believed would remove barriers were hiring additional Spanish-speaking staff and providing nametags in Spanish for staff members that are bilingual. One participant stated, “When no one understands, we leave.”

Focus group participants from the Adult Literacy program likewise suggested additional Spanish speaking staff would make the library more accessible to those with limited English skills. Also suggested were acoustically controlled tutoring spaces. Many participants noted that embarrassment about being seen and heard learning to read is a barrier to joining the program. Overall, however, the program is greatly valued by the participants. As one member stated, “When you don’t know how to read, it’s like living with your eyes closed.”

The teens focus group, held at the Rincon Valley Library, discussed how the library could best meet the needs of students. The participants stated that they use the library mainly as a place to study, do research for schoolwork, and use the computers for word processing. The public library is essential for their work, as the school libraries typically are limited in hours and collection. Participants stated that they would like the library to add study spaces for group work where discussion would not disrupt other patrons. Also noted was, that since they spend many hours at the library after school waiting for parents, they need more comfortable seating and a small cafe to get a snack so they can continue to concentrate on their work.

A focus group was held in the Town of Windsor with the parents of students at the Cali-Calamec school. Participants stated that they use the Windsor Library primarily as a pick-up and drop-off point for materials only. They would like to use the facility as a meeting place, to do research, and as a quiet place to read with their children, however, the lack of seating prevents them from doing so. The collection was also described as very limited, especially the Spanish collection, with one respondent stating that she “finds what I need about 10% of the time.” With additional space, the participants would like the library to provide separate computers for children and adults, a family space where entire families could read or work together, and to become a one-stop cultural center with joint-programs in art, karate, performing arts, and media production.

E. Local Stakeholder Committee Meetings

During the course of the study, 20 Local Stakeholder Committee meetings were held with city officials, community leaders, and library users. The



*Sonoma Valley Local
Stakeholders Committee
Meeting*

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role of these committees is to bring information on local needs to library staff and the consultant team, to act as a conduit of information to the groups the participants represent, to provide comments on recommendations, and to explore ideas for implementing the recommendations.



F. Local Official Meetings

Nine meetings were held with local government officials to discuss the recommendations and specific approaches to implementation. These meetings helped to ensure that local leadership was clearly aware of recommendations and could offer comments on how and when their communities could move forward with library projects.

G. County Library Committee

A County Library Committee was formed to offer a countywide perspective on library services and facilities. Representatives were chosen from every part of the county and included media representatives, students, educators, and representatives from the County government and many cities. The County Library Committee met twice during the course of the master plan process.

H. Staff Interviews

Interviews were conducted with the branch managers and key staff in each component of the library to help assess the need and define service areas.

Throughout the system, staff described facilities that are too small to serve the needs of their community and actually made serving the public more difficult. The lack of shelving space limits the collection's ability to provide adequate materials for academic support, Spanish speaking patrons, and an adequate video/DVD/CD collection. Space constraints also result in crowding and subsequent noise conflicts, especially after school when students need a place to work together on homework. Space for computers is also limited, resulting in long lines and strict time limitations on usage and a difficult management issue for staff. Lack of space also restricts the number of people that can attend library programs such as children's storytime, and limits how much staff can advertise these events.

In addition, the staff spaces in most facilities are spread throughout the building, making their workflow inefficient. Circulation desks are removed from the work room where materials are sorted. Book returns are remote from any workspace, requiring book bins to be emptied and carted through the library frequently. Reference desks have poor sightlines to other staff points and seating areas which raises security issues. Staff workstations are too small to accommodate new time-saving equipment and the growing number of materials that need to be processed.

I. Staff Survey

Library staff were asked to complete the same survey as their patrons. Ninety-one surveys were completed by staff from all Library branches except Forestville; the greatest numbers of responses were received from staff at Santa Rosa Central Library and the Petaluma Library.

The most positive attributes identified by staff of the current libraries is the extended library community of staff, Friends of the Library, volunteers, and their regular patrons, as well as the collection and the convenient location of facilities.

When asked what library services should be improved, quieter spaces, group study spaces, and availability of computers were the most frequent response. Staff also raised concerns regarding the cleanliness of the facilities, security issues with homeless people and the general ambiance of the buildings related to lighting, ventilation, and finishes.

Services that staff would most like to see added were similar to those requested by their patrons: a homework center, a computer training area, and additional joint programming with other institutions.

J. The Sonoma County Library Commission

The Sonoma County Library Commission is the governing body of the Sonoma County Library and is appointed by the County Board of Supervisors and the City Councils of Santa Rosa and Petaluma. Library Commission representatives participated in each of the County Library Committee and Local Stakeholder Committees as well. On February 5th, 2003, prior to the presentation of the final report, the Library Commission received a presentation and offered comments on the findings, on needs, and preliminary recommendations.

ONGOING PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN THE PLANNING OF FUTURE FACILITIES

A broad section of the Sonoma County community has contributed to the Library Facilities Master Plan. The Library should continue to involve the public in future planning for the system. Public participation is critical for planning specific local library projects in order to ensure that they respond to local concerns and support the library system. City and county government leaders should include the public in planning library building projects.

*Public participation in
library planning is critical
for success*