



Strategic Plan 2023-2026 Final Report

In the Spring of 2022, the Effingham Public Library Board of Trustees and staff undertook a strategic planning process. Once again, the library used the components of community engagement found in the Harwood Institute's method. We had utilized this method in 2016 and it yielded a plan that was highly adaptable and allowed us to shift with changes in our community, including the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the success of that strategic plan, the decision was made to once again utilize the Harwood method.

For the 2022 strategic planning process, we focused on using all three tools found in the Harwood Institute's package. These resources are all freely available through the Libraries Transform Communities toolkit on the Public Library Associations website. The tools are the Aspirations tool, the Ask tool, and Community Conversations. The focus for all of these tools is on the community as a whole and less about how the library is performing in certain areas. Instead, the results from these tools yield pathways for the library to assist the community with reaching their collective aspirations.

We also utilized the results from the Community MAPPING program that also ran during the Spring of 2022. This effort was organized by the Effingham County Chamber and sought to create a comprehensive vision for Effingham County. Participants in that process embarked on a similar goal of vision setting for the entire community.

ASPIRATIONS

The Aspirations tool was used internally for staff and the board. It was an opportunity for those two groups to share what they envisioned for our community as well as explore what would need to change within the community in order to achieve the vision.

Aspirations that came up centered around the themes of growth (housing and childcare), health (access to mental health providers as well as general practice providers and increased access to recreation), and creating a welcoming atmosphere.

The conditions that need to change included a lot of mentions around mental health support as well as being more open as a community to a diverse range of experiences.

ASK

For the Ask Tool, staff and board members were charged with seeking out people in the community to pose the four questions to. They were encouraged to seek out people that

they did not know and/or did not interact with on a regular basis in order to get a diverse range of perspectives. We had close to 100 responses to this tool.

The questions posed were: What kind of community do you want to live in? Why is that important to you? How is that different from how you see things now? What are some of the things that need to happen to create that kind of change?

Overwhelmingly, people stated that they wanted to live in a community that was fun, safe, and where they felt valued and respected.

COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

During the community conversations, we went deeper into the topics of community building. We conducted 7 community conversations, most in person and several via Zoom. Each group was asked the same set of focus group questions, but the responses varied widely.

Similar issues were identified as with the other tools, such as housing, childcare, safety, and access to mental health services. However, the responses went deeper and helped to identify specific ideas for improving our community.

COMMUNITY MAPPING

The community MAPPING process yielded several interesting results that culminated in the formation of 5 focus areas: Housing, Childcare, Workforce and Education, Parks and Recreation, and Festivals and Events. Work has already launched in each of these areas and the library is directly involved in several initiatives, specifically those around Childcare and Workforce and Education.

EFFINGHAM PUBLIC LIBRARY: STRATEGIC GOALS

Five strategic goals were determined as a result of our data gathering and looking at the information gathered from other recent strategic planning efforts within the community. Family Support, Leadership, Education, Community, and Diversity were the 5 areas identified. Under each of those areas, specific goals were developed, including things like "Provide library service to all in our community" and "Create opportunities for families to connect and find support and services." We will also develop an annual action plan that ties specific activities to each goal. All of these documents are approved by the Board of Trustees and are then posted on our website.