

Buffalo & Erie County Public Library

Five-Year Plan of Service

2007 – 2011

Back to Basics... and Beyond

Introduction

When many baby boomers entered the library profession in the late-1960s or early-1970s, the definition of “Google” (actually, “googol”) was: “The number 10 raised to the power 100, written out as the numeral 1 followed by 100 zeros.”

That mathematical term inspired the name of what is today the largest search engine on the Web, i.e., “Google.” Allegedly, when computer scientists at Stanford University were trying to describe something that relates to the indexing of an immense amount of data, one suggested the term “googol,” as it refers to a specific large number. A colleague executed a search of the Internet domain name registry to determine whether that name was still available for registration and use. As computer scientists can be notoriously bad spellers, he typed the letters G-O-O-G-L-E rather than G-O-O-G-O-L and found that “google.com,” was, in fact, available. Within hours, “google.com” was registered, and the rest is history.

That was 1997. Fast forward to the early years of the Third Millennium, where “Google” isn’t just a noun; it is also a verb, an adjective and a daily staple in the lives of many millions who use the Net for business, pleasure, education, self-improvement or any number of pursuits.

Depending on whom you consult, more information has been produced in the last 25 years than in the previous 5,000. Half of all recorded information has been generated in the past five years. Given the staggering scope of this information avalanche, everyone needs better tools to sift through the haystack in order to find the elusive needle of knowledge. Historically, libraries have been the preferred and best-equipped means to address that need among the general populace.

In 2005, OCLC (the Online Computer Library Center, which manages the world’s largest bibliographic database) published a landmark survey, *Perceptions of*

Libraries and Information Resources, a comprehensive study administered in the United States and other English-speaking countries, including Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom.

The survey was enlightening, and any library engaged in planning for the future cannot ignore its findings. First, it offers libraries some good news. Ninety-six percent of respondents have visited a public library in person, and 72% of respondents aged 25 and older report having a library card.

Elsewhere in the study, however, there are some sobering statistics. Seventy-two percent of respondents have used search engines, but only 30% have used a library website, and only 16% have used an online database. Respondents have very favorable attitudes about the usefulness and reliability of commercial search engines, and 84% begin their search for information on a particular topic using a search engine. By contrast, only 1% begins using an online database, and only 1% begins using a library website.

A section of the study devoted to the “library brand” includes additional perspectives on the perceived trustworthiness of library resources and search engines. Sixty-nine percent of respondents consider results from search engines as trustworthy as a library information resource, while only 22% believe that information from a library is more reliable or authoritative. *Perceptions of Libraries and Information Services* raises questions about the extent of our continued investment in certain resources and approaches to developing and managing library websites and their content when so many respondents believe Google results are adequate for their needs.

There are other reassurances for libraries, however. First and foremost, respondents associate the library brand with “books.” Survey participants also assert that a broader mission for the library is to provide access to information and that information services should be free to all. People want collections that are current, multiple copies of bestsellers, friendly, helpful staff, convenient and adequate hours, inviting buildings, access to current technology and many more amenities that most contemporary libraries strive to provide. Recent Buffalo & Erie County Public Library survey results support these findings. Not surprisingly, patrons don’t appreciate discourteous or unhelpful staff, limited or inconvenient hours, lack of parking, etc. Their positive and negative associations with libraries merit our collective consideration as we set our priorities for the years ahead.

More recently, on June 13, 2006, Public Agenda with support from the Americans for Libraries Council with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation released *Long Overdue: A Fresh Look at Public Attitudes About Libraries in the 21st Century*, a study that reports the results of a national survey of the general public

as well as interviews with national and local civic leaders. This multi-level public opinion study identifies a troubling issue for library advocates: While Americans give their public libraries an “A” more often than any other community service (45% give libraries an “A”) and a large majority of the public (71%) says their local library uses public money well, too few Americans are aware of the increasingly insecure financial picture faced by many libraries.

Four areas of opportunity resonated most with the public and leaders alike: (1) providing stronger services for teens, (2) helping address illiteracy and poor reading skills among adults, (3) providing ready access to information about government services, including making public documents and forms readily available and (4) providing even greater access to computers for all.

While Americans value basic library services, they also highly value and endorse the further development of Internet access and other computer services at the library. Almost two-thirds of Americans (64%) believe having enough computers and online services for people should be a “high priority” for their local library. Roughly a third (35%) report having visited the website of a public library.

The American public has a clear consensus of what is absolutely crucial for basic success in a local library. More than 8 in 10 Americans believe that keeping services free should be a very high priority. Having enough current books for children, adequate reference resources, friendly, knowledgeable staff and good programs for children and teens are also considered absolute essentials for libraries.

Libraries came out on top when the public assessed the performance of local institutions ranging from public schools and the police department to public parks and cultural activities. On which institutions do the best job in their communities, more Americans said libraries are doing an “excellent” job (31%) — better than the local police department (22%), public schools (18%), local media (12%) or local government (7%).

Long Overdue finds the greatest challenge for libraries today is not convincing the public of their worth. Research validates libraries’ community value, serving many current needs and adapting to those that arise. “But libraries cannot survive on accolades alone,” the report concludes. “If they are to compete successfully for dwindling public dollars, if they are to develop the community connections and visibility that they require to thrive, public libraries will need to look carefully at opportunities to showcase and strengthen their role in addressing serious problems in their own communities. Then they need to start speaking up and reaching out to the citizen soldiers who can help support and buttress this vital community institution.”

In addition to the data and insights gathered from reputable reports and professional publications, B&ECPL staff and trustees have been engaged in a number of activities that contributed fresh ideas, sound criticism, necessary venting and valuable insights into the 2007-2011 planning process. Among them were three Organizational Renewal Sessions conducted by Career Partners International (March 2006), Diversity Awareness Training conducted by the National Conference for Community and Justice (NCCJ) with B&ECPL managers and directors (April 2006) and more than 65 “Town Hall Meetings” with staff at all locations and trustees representing the System and various contracting libraries during the second and third quarters of 2006. The general public has been afforded an opportunity to share its views through online and printed surveys (cited in Appendix B) and open meetings where trustees and staff presented the proposed plan and entertained feedback for its modification and improvement.

As B&ECPL strives to reinvent itself in the wake of funding cuts, branch closings, layoffs, service reductions and ongoing fiscal uncertainty, two things remain clear. First, the traditional role of the library as a community space associated with books and reading remains valid and valuable. Second, as we struggle to understand and establish our role in the era of search engines and the Internet, we must invest our limited resources in those services that make the most sense. Any attempt to ignore, disparage or compete with Google will result in nothing less than frustration and failure.

Instead, we should learn from Google and identify more and better ways to serve our customers quickly, simply and to their satisfaction.

There are many things libraries can do that Google can't. We need to focus on those, getting back to the basics as we adapt to the new challenges, new demands and new opportunities that lie beyond tomorrow.

Michael C. Mahaney
Director

Resource Sharing

One of the Library's foremost goals is to provide access to needed information and materials through centralized selection, consolidated ordering, uniform collection development guidelines and standards, a reliable delivery infrastructure and authoritative electronic collections.

Prior to the severe cutbacks in materials budget allocations between 2004 and 2006, the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library System was a model of timely and responsive acquisition and delivery of new materials. Repeatedly, both the public and staff have identified the availability of new materials as the Library's highest priority. (See Appendix B for survey results.) As the Library strives to rebuild its materials budget to an adequate and sustainable level, the System will enhance support for timely acquisition and appropriate resource sharing to ensure that materials in a variety of formats are available to users throughout the County.

To provide quicker and more comprehensive access to needed information and materials not owned by B&ECPL, online document delivery and patron-placed Interlibrary Loan (ILL) requests will be added to ILL services. The ILL department will be streamlined with the implementation of resource sharing management software that automates routine ILL functions and a possible consolidation with another department performing similar tasks.

Using interviews, surveys, data collection and analysis and other means, B&ECPL staff will work with patrons to develop a better understanding of their collection needs and preferences.

Activities for 2007-2011 Planning Period:

- Restore Library Materials Budget to appropriate levels to meet patron needs (i.e., 15% of annual operating budget)
- Improve centralized selection process and checklists for system-wide ordering
- Develop new collection development guidelines and standards
- Improve Interlibrary Loan (ILL) system and remote services

Technology Services

Technology services are an integral part of the way the Library serves its patrons in the 21st century. Resources formerly available at only one library location now are available at all locations, as well as homes, offices and schools — or virtually anywhere in today’s wireless world. The availability of public access computers has become the greatest equalizer in the history of public libraries, bridging the “digital divide” by assisting those socioeconomic groups with both the greatest need and the fewest personal resources to compete on a level playing field with the rest of the local and global community. Productivity tools provided to library staff allow a significantly reduced workforce to continue delivering exemplary service, even in trying times.

In B&ECPL’s past three planning cycles, the goals and objectives for technology services have emphasized building an infrastructure and implementing basic tools necessary for staff and patrons. Soon, the last of these fundamental targets will be attained, and the Library will have a springboard from which to leap forward with a wide-range of new resources, services and conveniences for the community.

These will allow B&ECPL to serve not only current users, but also to reach beyond the walls of library buildings to the many residents of Buffalo and Erie County, who, for whatever reason, are not availing themselves of everything the Library has to offer. Very soon, for example, downloadable audio books will be available to any individual who has a valid library card. Without ever visiting a library branch and at a time when libraries might be closed, a patron will be able to visit the Library’s website to select and download a current bestseller to his or her MP3 player. Many American libraries already offer this service — as well as downloadable video, which B&ECPL will investigate when the success of downloadable audio is confirmed and financial resources permit.

B&ECPL is also investigating ways for patrons to pay fines with a credit or debit card using e-Commerce via a secure website. With this service, a patron will be able to clear fines or fees from a personal borrower account in order to take advantage of the Library’s many on-line services, such as requesting materials or downloading new audio titles.

In addition, as noted above under RESOURCE SHARING, anyone with access to the Internet will be able to request genealogical or other locally generated and maintained content (both print and non-print), using a new, automated Interlibrary Loan system and have that information electronically transferred to his or her computer without ever leaving the comfort of home.

To enhance reference services to remote library patrons, B&ECPL will explore 24/7 reference and investigate other information delivery technologies. Virtual reference and online library resources (databases and web links) will be redesigned to provide more intuitive access.

A website is the ideal location for a clearinghouse of local government information. Searching among many agencies and organizations for the required information is frequently frustrating. B&ECPL will build and maintain a government information clearinghouse for Erie County.

These are just a few illustrations of how the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library will use technology in the coming five years to entice patrons to take advantage of all that the Library has to offer -- either by visiting one of the 37 locations or via the B&ECPL website -- to delight them, to serve their daily needs, to assist them in learning -- to make a difference in their lives.

Activities for 2007-2011 Planning Period:

- Redesign public website for improved content management, appearance and ease of use
- Upgrade online catalog to add new features and make searching easier
- Enhance online services, including reference and delivery
- Introduce productivity improvements, including additional self-charge machines, where appropriate
- Improve and enhance communication systems, including telephone, instant messaging and blogging
- Provide wireless access at all libraries that require it
- Provide e-Commerce solutions
- Establish online clearinghouse for government information

Special Client Group Needs

Services to youth remain the lynchpin for the future of the Library System. Success will be gauged by quality programs and collections developed by an appropriate number of well-trained personnel whose primary responsibilities are

devoted to youth services. With this in mind, the System should seek to establish a centralized team to create and deliver youth programs at multiple locations. Enhancing web and catalog resources for youth will help keep pace with 21st century expectations.

At-risk youth can be found in the urban, suburban and rural communities of Erie County. By increasing staff awareness and training in this area, the Library will enhance services, explore materials and technologies to engage and assist this targeted population. New programs will be developed that focus on the specific needs and challenges of at-risk youth.

Providing a place where teens can find appealing resources, activities and surroundings represents a key gap in service, not just in Erie County, but in communities across the country. B&ECPL staff must work to improve library services to local young adults, especially by identifying an appropriate space within each library for this group's particular needs and wants. Physical space is not all young adults require; they also need evidence that their interests are represented virtually as well as physically. Today's teens are more likely to gravitate toward the Library if it is responsive to their media and electronic preferences, not just their traditional print needs. Staff must continue to reach out to all levels of school, both public and private, as well as community centers, clubs, etc. to make young people aware of everything the library has -- and will have -- to offer them.

Staff conducted a survey of all libraries to evaluate services to older adults and persons with disabilities. As a result of that survey, libraries became aware of adjustments that could be made in the physical arrangements at locations to serve both populations better. Some assistive technology (i.e., *ZoomText* screen magnifying software) is available at every location. Selected locations offer *Jaws* screen reading software to assist the visually impaired. Handicapped accessible workstations have been installed. Equipment to enhance the library experience for older adults and persons with disabilities has been recommended for purchase, and grants to acquire them are being pursued. Guidelines for creating legible print materials for all users were developed and distributed to all libraries. Sensitivity training sessions for staff have been conducted.

B&ECPL's library services to the Erie County Home have improved the quality of life issues that many residents of that facility encounter. Library staff, Home staff and volunteers all work to ensure quality library service.

The 2007-2011 planning period will be a time to investigate and (potentially) reestablish outreach services on a wider platform. Current services must be assessed and partnerships developed with agencies that provide services to older adults, persons with disabilities and other target populations.

The Central Library continues as a primary resource for persons with disabilities, providing in-house service and acting as a clearinghouse for equipment and special collection materials for the public and the Library System. Lacking sufficient capital funds to retrofit buildings, not all libraries are in compliance with the standards set by the Americans with Disabilities Act, but this remains an important goal.

Particular attention has been devoted to business services and aiding economic development in Western New York. Courses on business electronic resources have been developed and offered to the public and staff. Work continues at the Central Library with business organizations, such as the Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE) and in the maintenance of collections for small businesses. Staff continues to explore the creation of a site at the Central Library for these businesses and agencies to meet with clients and access B&ECPL resources.

The 2005 budget constraints that curtailed mobile library operations now offer an opportunity to research other methods of delivery for outreach services to underserved communities including re-sized mobile units that can provide collections and technology more efficiently, more flexibly and more cost effectively.

In 2006, a member of the B&ECPL staff will receive instruction in the WebJunction Spanish Language Outreach Project. The Project is designed to train staff to do library outreach to Spanish-speaking persons in the Library's chartered service area.

Establishment of a full-time position to coordinate Library outreach activities should be revisited to develop new programs and coordinate services with local and regional agencies. New members should be added to the Outreach Advisory Committee.

Activities for 2007-2011 Planning Period:

- Continue to partner with Head Start programs, youth agencies and others to meet the needs of at-risk youth
- Continue to partner with businesses, business support organizations and local agencies to support economic development, entrepreneurship and career opportunities for individuals
- Build on success of "Battle of the Books" and investigate innovative youth programming (e.g., interactive computer games for teens or poetry slams)
- Train staff in serving young adults and explore establishment of centralized programming team for youth services

- Establish defined teen spaces in libraries, involving teens in the planning and implementation process
- Develop a marketing strategy for youth services to “get the word out” and solicit feedback from the community
- Revisit mobile outreach options to serve target populations
- Offer web-based features and services that appeal to and meet the needs of identified target populations

Continuing Education and Training

Computer training for patrons and staff also fell victim to depleted budgets in 2005 and 2006. Computer labs sat idle for many months, with the exception of children’s programs at Central and the new Frank E. Merriweather, Jr. Library, funded by a grant from Verizon Yellow Pages in the summer of 2006. Recent surveys indicate training programs are missed and must be restored. Alternative training mechanisms must be explored, including: virtual training, webcasts, vendor instructors, etc. Additional funding will be pursued through the Development Office.

A variety of training opportunities should be offered to library users. Patrons will be surveyed, both electronically and via paper forms, to further articulate community-training needs. Specialized programs such as job searching, Internet safety and e-mail must be conducted to meet the requirements of special user groups.

With fewer staff, training becomes more difficult, but even more important. An annual Staff Development Day will afford an opportunity for employees at all levels, in all positions, to gather, learn and enhance skills such as customer service, future technologies, System policies procedures and goals. Staff will be encouraged to attend other training opportunities to further improve job skills. A modest budget will be designated for such instruction.

Activities for 2007-2011 Planning Period:

- Survey public and staff to identify training priorities
- Pursue public and private funds to restore training programs

Consulting and Technical Assistance Services

B&ECPL's federated structure affords a unique and valuable support network for contracting libraries. The Central Library serves not only as a treasure trove of information, resources and facilities for the general public, but it also offers a variety of services to support the efforts of branch and contract library staff. In addition to subject department expertise in answering or assisting with remote, in-depth reference questions, a variety of departments are housed in the Central Library that offer direct consulting and technical assistance services. Library Administration, the Business Office, the Office of Community Relations, the Graphics Department, the Human Resources Office, the Development Office, the Support Services Department, Network Support, the Office of System Public Services and Borrower Services all have direct contact with branch and contract libraries on a regular basis. Routine or specialized assistance is offered in person, over the phone or electronically. Areas of support may include technology, collection development, patron dispute resolution, acquisitions support, budget management, aggregate utility purchasing, human resources consultation and benefits administration as well as guidance in advocacy efforts, public relations and fundraising.

Activities for 2007-2011 Planning Period:

- Conduct annual survey of community libraries (boards, staff and other stakeholders to determine and prioritize consulting and technical services needs

Coordinated Services

B&ECPL's federated structure and funding methods have allowed it to provide highly integrated services to all public libraries within the county-wide service area, taking advantage of economies of scale to provide improved quality and lower costs for these services. System services include managing and directly paying for the cost of the online catalog, automated circulation system, Internet access and associated network support functions, telephone and e-mail reference, centralized selection of bestseller and high demand materials, electronic databases, automation, acquisition, cataloging, materials processing, repair of damaged material, program development, inter-library loan and materials shipment among all B&ECPL locations.

In cooperation with Erie County, the System manages employee health insurance and pays most operating costs for all libraries. Further, the System purchases

most libraries' electricity and all libraries' natural gas through the Erie County aggregate purchasing pool.

To achieve cost control objectives and reduction of liability exposure without the legislative and inter-governmental cooperation necessary to achieve the "One Hiring Authority" concept proposed by Aaron Cohen Associates in 1998, B&ECPL modified the concept and created the Centralized Human Resources (CHR) Program. A voluntary program introduced as a pilot in 2001, CHR conveys several of the intended advantages of "One Hiring Authority" without a sweeping overhaul of B&ECPL governance.

CHR affords the following benefits:

- Annual cost savings of funds now paid to independent payroll processing companies;
- Reduced exposure to IRS/State Department of Revenue fines for errors and omissions related to payroll taxes;
- Significantly simplified interactions with the New York State Retirement System, eliminating most paperwork now completed at the local library level;
- Participation/guidance in hiring processes to ensure adherence to fair employment rules, reducing liability exposure from errors made by untrained and inexperienced staff and/or trustees;
- Simplified accounts payable and financial monitoring by eliminating need for quarterly checks and separate cash-flow systems to support payroll;
- Centralized health benefits for all staff, as well as retirees, eliminating the risk of providers denying Erie County group rates to contracting libraries.

Today, 15 contracting libraries (17 locations) have joined the CHR program, with seven more to enlist.

Activities for 2007-2011 Planning Period:

- Extend Centralized Human Resources Program across the breadth of the System, incorporating every contracting library by the end of 2008, pursuant to a recommendation of the Erie County Fiscal Stability Authority
- Investigate other elements of the ACA "One Hiring Authority" concept to achieve greater management flexibility and cost containment throughout

the county, while preserving the local authority of contracting library boards

Awareness and Advocacy

Between 2004 and 2006, Erie County residents were bombarded with messages about the financial crisis in local government. Often, these messages were confusing, inconsistent and barely skimmed the surface of much more complicated issues. Regardless, the issues were real, and residents encountered unwelcome changes in the services delivered by local government, including many at their local library -- dramatic decreases in the availability of new materials, fewer and less convenient hours, elimination of popular and valued programs and training opportunities, new and increased fees, fewer staff to deliver service and last -- but certainly not least -- locked doors as library buildings closed permanently across the county. These circumstances led to frustration, confusion and dissatisfaction.

B&ECPL cannot afford to ignore these challenging facts of life, but must proactively address them in order to reengineer public service, and return the Library to the public's awareness and gain support among all of its stakeholders. Generating a new, greater appreciation of the services, resources and return on investment that B&ECPL offers is a priority. The Library must use a variety of communication tools to reach as many non-users, past users and current users as possible. Repetition of positive, consistent messages also makes a greater impact.

This awareness campaign must be implemented in conjunction with regular advocacy activities. In a time of fiscal uncertainty, it is essential for the Library to work continuously to engender support from trustees, friends groups, public officials at all levels, businesses, community organizations, volunteers and taxpayers. Through regular contacts, new partnerships, an increased number of advocates and private donations, B&ECPL will work to ensure that it has the resources necessary to meet the many needs of our diverse community.

Activities for 2007-2011 Planning Period:

- Implement comprehensive, general library awareness campaign, utilizing media, paid advertising (where necessary), printed promotional materials and other innovative methods
- Offer greater promotion of online resources to various target audiences, including surveys of patron preferences and needs

- Educate Erie County public officials with individualized information on the libraries within their districts
- Provide contract and branch libraries with advocacy information to share with their boards, friends groups, volunteers and patrons, and assist them in their advocacy efforts
- Develop and maintain up-to-date contact lists, especially Buffalo Public Schools and other area school districts
- Reach out to area businesses and organizations for potential collaborations

Communications among Member Libraries and Branches

Patrons appreciate and expect a friendly and responsive staff when visiting their local library. Recruiting, training and retaining employees committed to providing excellent customer service are top priorities for B&ECPL. This depends strongly on keeping staff informed and “connected” in a timely and effective manner. Employees need to feel a sense of ownership within the greater organization, and communication, among all levels, being shared in all directions, is vital. Successful communication builds morale, trust, knowledge and confidence among staff. All efforts must be undertaken to enhance internal communication mechanisms.

As individual libraries within the System struggle with reductions in staff and other resources, it is imperative that all locations and departments maximize their efforts by exchanging ideas, communicating best practices and adopting new approaches to common tasks.

Electronic distribution of reports, memoranda and directives allows immediate dissemination of important information; however, electronic distribution is effective only when all parties have access to it. Staff must examine both internal and external communication methods and mechanisms (print, electronic, telephone, interpersonal, etc.) to ensure the most inclusive means of sharing necessary information with staff.

Activities for 2007-2011 Planning Period:

- Redesign the staff Intranet and provide training on new content, organization and tools
- Develop and post new timesaving resources and tools on the Intranet

- Offer regular incentives for Intranet use and/or idea sharing
- Investigate and implement best new forms of online internal communication such as blogging, podcasting, etc.
- Enlist staff at all levels of the organization for feedback as well as for their participation on various library working committees and task forces

Cooperative Efforts with Other Library Systems

B&ECPL does not exist in a vacuum. Communicating and cooperating with other library systems, especially those in Western New York, conveys reciprocal benefit. The exchange of expertise and insights (from trustees as well as staff) enable all parties to accomplish more in spite of dwindling public resources. Presentations by out-of-town experts both reinforce local methods of serving the public and introduce new approaches that might not have been considered locally. Further, especially through involvement in the Public Library Systems Directors Organization (PULISDO), the New York Library Association (NYLA) and the Western New York Library Resources Council (WNYLRC), collaboration and information exchange among library systems can advance legislation beneficial to libraries and secure improved public funding to support library programs. Joint application for grants and awards (e.g., a Rural Sustainability Grant coordinated with the NIOGA Library System to provide funding for training of rural library staff in new technologies) enables both partners to accomplish more than they might through independent actions.

Activities for 2007-2011 Planning Period:

- Pursue improved funding, legislation and collaborations through participation in activities of PULISDO, NYLA, WNYLRC and direct communication with neighboring libraries and library systems

Construction

Of all the recommendations of the 1998 Aaron Cohen Associates (ACA) study, the one that attracted the greatest attention and generated the most controversy and open resistance was the call for “fewer, better libraries.” The ACA proposal for new, state-of-the-art libraries that serve regions, not just neighborhoods, that

offer better services and collections in more appealing environments was lost in the public outcry to sustain “what we have” at the expense of “what might be.”

Many considered the ACA concept of a “Third Millennium Fund” — \$45 to \$50 million assembled to underwrite a new B&ECPL infrastructure — unrealistic, at the very least. In Erie County’s struggling economic environment, the suggested sums appeared beyond almost anyone’s wildest dreams. Certainly, in light of the past 24 months, the notion seems farfetched, even preposterous.

What might appear more conceivable today is a smaller commitment, between \$2 and \$3 million per year, to engineer a more reasonable overture to a long-range rebuilding of the Library System.

To prepare for these new libraries, B&ECPL’s Board of Trustees revised and adopted *Guidelines and Procedures for New Library Construction* in April 2002. More recently, B&ECPL staff generated a *Generic Building Program*, which can be customized for any new library construction project and can expedite the process of designing state-of-the-art libraries without re-inventing the wheel.

Further, it is the hope of B&ECPL staff that a true “model library” can be designed in a modular form, so a basic plan can be utilized multiple times, reducing overall design costs but allowing for reasonable modifications to accommodate variable size/shape building lots and facades that complement unique street-scapes.

Activities for 2007-2011 Planning Period:

- Pursue renovation/replacement projects as committed revenue sources are identified
- Encourage matching funds from interested partners to maximize regional impact and local “ownership” of construction projects

Central Library Services

Some critics of urban central libraries consider them anachronisms — white elephants that no longer serve a compelling purpose. Originally designed as warehouses for vast inventories of printed matter intended for research, general reference or circulation, these literal “book-boxes” might seem obsolete in an era when more and more information is available in digital rather than physical form and is accessible remotely, without the effort or expense of transporting oneself or one’s family to a regional center.

The Central Library's potential, however, is far more encompassing.

The 21st century Central Library is Erie County's "Information Commons" — a gathering place where many residents from across the region can avail themselves not only of the largest and most diverse collection of books, magazines and media accessible at a single location, but reserve a computer to surf the Net, enjoy a quality public program for children, families or adults, view a first-rate exhibition of library resources or a traveling exhibit from outside the area or attend a training class for entrepreneurs, inventors or the general public. Afterward, they can complete the experience with a cup of coffee or a tasty lunch in the café and, perhaps, spend some cash in the gift shop — with the knowledge that their patronage benefits the Library.

Those with specialized information needs can plumb the depths of a world-class retrospective collection — little of which has been digitized — and, if necessary, seek the assistance of staff skilled in such exploration.

Activity at the Central Library in 2006 continues to exceed comparable activity in the previous year, due, at least in part, to recent renovations that have attracted many first-time visitors as well as clientele from other parts of Buffalo and Erie County where libraries closed in 2005.

There is no doubt that research and reference have changed dramatically in the past decade, with the Internet and its resources allowing the general public not only easier access to more of the answers they seek, but much greater facility in serving themselves. The Central Library — and libraries in general — must adapt to these changing circumstances, devoting adequate and appropriate personnel to the tasks associated with meeting public needs and making adjustments in staffing when traditional models cease to apply.

In terms of logistics and management, the Central Library remains the optimal site for System-wide centralized operations (i.e., acquisitions, processing and cataloging of materials, remote reference, network support, administration, etc.). A single location with sufficient space to address all of those functions benefits the entire System, not just those who visit the Central Library.

The Central Library also offers some opportunities for co-tenancy with other organizations, a unique locale for revenue generating public or private events and the exciting prospect of eventual connection with Erie Community College's proposed northward expansion along the Elm-Oak arterial.

Adding to the flexibility and efficiency of Central's operation, increased cross training of staff began in 2003 and continues today. Remote reference through

eBranch, which is housed in the Central Library, must be refined and redefined to maximize its visibility and value to B&ECPL patrons and staff.

In 2004, some Central Library service points were combined (i.e., the three-to-one consolidation of Music, Microform and Special Collections into the Grosvenor Room). Plans to create a ready reference desk in a reconfigured circulating non-fiction department are in development. Cost savings could be realized through this consolidation and realignment of staff.

In April 2005, Phase I of a multi-year Central Library facelift introduced a dramatic new entrance, efficient borrower services area that includes self check-out equipment, a revenue-generating café and an updated gift shop and used book store. The revamped Popular Materials Department and “Ring of Knowledge” exhibition area opened later in 2005. Future phases of proposed renovations would address ACA criticism related to security, wasted space, and recouping costs of operation, including further co-tenancy or multi-use opportunities similar to the café.

The development of the Central Library as a unique downtown destination continues. Stepped up programming at the Central Library has attracted new audiences, and funding is being sought to expand these efforts, emphasizing Central Library treasures and the proficiencies of its staff. Visibility of local history and genealogy resources will be heightened. Digitization of unique resources will increase both accessibility and awareness. Completion of the renovation of the first floor, including the Children’s Department, Grosvenor Rare Book Room and the area currently occupied by the Humanities and Social Sciences Department will attract increased use.

Support for Erie County’s economic development, through enhanced service to individuals, government and businesses, is an important part of the Central Library’s mission. Steps will be taken to increase the use of business resources through partnerships and the marketing of both new and existing materials. Popular small business development resources will be maintained and expanded. The need for services to the unemployed and underemployed continue to rise in demand and must be addressed.

The Central Library boasts two computer training labs. The Library must extend and expand successful partnerships, such as its current one with Verizon Yellow Pages, which resulted in the creation of the LEAD lab and popular computer programs for youth. The suspension of formal computer training programs for the public due to budget constraints must be revisited. Library patrons have sorely missed this valued service. Staff will also explore alternative methods of providing training for both the public and Library personnel.

Activities for 2007-2011 Planning Period:

- Develop a cohesive and compelling marketing campaign for the Central Library to promote its unique resources and increase its use
- Promote the Central Library's unique collections through digitization, programs and exhibition
- Redefine role of e-Branch and educate both staff and public regarding its purpose and service capacities
- Pursue funding for completion of Central Library renovations

Other Goals

Governance

For more than 50 years, the federated structure of B&ECPL governance has served the Library System reasonably well with few but painful exceptions that might not have been avoided even if another form of governance had been in effect. Nevertheless, in times of fiscal stress, some have suggested that other options be explored.

To address that concern and the questions surrounding it, B&ECPL trustees and administrative staff solicited the assistance of the New York State Library's Division of Library Development (DLD). Under contract with DLD, Richard Panz of Panz Library Consulting (Webster, NY) visited Buffalo on multiple occasions during the last quarter of 2005 and first quarter of 2006 to discuss options with trustees and staff. On March 18th, Mr. Panz outlined the range of viable alternatives available under New York State Education Law in a formal presentation at the 2006 B&ECPL Trustee Workshop, sponsored by the Association of Contracting Libraries.

The consensus of trustees and staff who participated in these preparatory meetings and the March 18th workshop is that the status quo is imperfect. While some form of change is needed, no clear agreement or strategy emerged regarding an optimal alternative. Therefore, all options should be kept on the table. Some fear change might be worse than staying the course because every alternative carries some risk.

No one is pleased with current levels of public funding. Some communities and their local library boards assert that they do not see enough return for their "local" property tax dollars. Some believe the Library would fare better if

funding were in the hands of the electorate rather than the County Executive and Legislature, but no one considers now a good time to test that belief, the current political and economic climate being too unstable and, as one trustee described it, “corrosive.”

Almost everyone agrees that now is a bad time to approach the electorate with a referendum that might be perceived as a new or more burdensome tax. Now, however, is the time for research and planning.

Many participants agreed that a county-wide system/district (perhaps an “overlay” model*) remains the preferred option. Most would not want to create an additional board to oversee that system. Some have concerns about representation on the System’s board of trustees, regardless of which model is chosen. The concept of an elected board appeals to some, perhaps a board that reflects geographical districts within the county, so each area has a voice in governing the System and allocating resources.

Activities for 2007-2011 Planning Period:

- Continue to monitor conditions (economic, political, etc.) on a regular basis and advise public officials of the various funding and governance alternatives available in order to garner their understanding and cooperation should a change be warranted

* **Note:** Since the 2006 Trustee Workshop presentation, the Rochester-Monroe County Library System, in collaboration with DLD, has begun to develop a new model based on the approved “overlay” concept -- one that might suit the needs of B&ECPL better than other available options. Subject to the approval of the NYS Board of Regents and successful implementation in Monroe County, this option demands closer scrutiny and consideration.

Funding and Finances

In 1976, B&ECPL had 576 full-time employees System-wide. Thirty years later, in 2006, full-time staff has been reduced by 62% to fewer than 220. Meanwhile, Library performance measures (e.g., 2004 circulation, prior to severe reductions in the purchase of new materials) indicate that the Library has doubled its productivity even as it has introduced a host of new services (e.g., public access computing and web-based reference) during that same 30-year period.

This seems a clear indication that B&ECPL not only manages its resources well, but also approaches challenges with innovation and always keeps an eye on economy.

For nearly 20 of the past 30 years, B&ECPL trustees and staff entertained the notion of establishing a fundraising arm that could tap into philanthropic reservoirs to secure new resources for projects and programs. These discussions occurred internally long before the incorporation of the Library Foundation of Buffalo and Erie County in 1991 and have been documented repeatedly, including in the outside management study commissioned by the Board of Trustees, *Leadership's Opportunity* (a.k.a. the Dubberly Report) in 1994, again in *The Buffalo and Erie County Public Library in the Third Millennium* in 1998, the Library's own strategic plans, *Expanding Horizons* (2000) and *Breaking New Ground* (2003), and finally, in a four-year plan developed for the Erie County Fiscal Stability Authority in 2005.

Over the past decade, in the absence of a dedicated development operation and in light of stagnant or declining public funding, the Library has explored many avenues to generate new income:

- **New fees and fines.** In 2003, for the first time in 20 years, the Library System increased its overdue fine rates, essentially doubling the previous schedule, in order to bridge a six-figure budget shortfall. More recently, B&ECPL instituted new fees, charging non-residents \$40 per year for borrowing privileges, and reinstating a fee for placing requests.
- **New Revenue Streams.** The Central Library has embarked on two innovative revenue-generating opportunities, a specialty gift item store opened in 2000 and completely remodeled in 2005, and a privately operated, full service café that opened concurrently.
- **Federal e-Rate Funding.** For nearly a decade, B&ECPL has secured more than \$1.7 million in reimbursements for state-of-the-art services and technologies at discounted rates.
- **Foundation Grants.** Multiple grants between 1997 and 2006 from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation provided roughly \$1 million to purchase computer equipment and software for libraries in Buffalo and Lackawanna. Verizon Yellow Pages has supported technology training for children and adults from 2003 to 2006, with four awards totaling \$140,000.
- **Corporate Partnerships.** A local chocolate manufacturer hosted two "Chocolate Passion" evenings, featuring a chocolate and wine tasting followed by a factory tour, that raised nearly \$5,000 for children's summer programs. William S. Hein Company, publishers of *Hein-Online* law journal, has provided this product to the Central Library at no cost and

contributed funding to support the Library. Other projects with Hein are being explored.

In recent years, the Library Foundation of Buffalo and Erie County has been unable to provide much financial assistance to the Library in support of special services, projects or programs. A reorganization of the Library Foundation is in process at this time.

With the devastating loss of \$7 million dollars of Erie County's annual financial support between 2004 and 2006, the time came to formalize the fundraising function with the establishment of a B&ECPL Development Office in January 2006. Looking forward, substantial increases in public funding are likely to remain elusive. Basic program delivery -- children's story hours, technology classes, outreach efforts -- will require supplemental revenue through grants and corporate partnerships.

Aggressive recruitment of volunteers to supplement beleaguered staff also must be undertaken.

Activities for 2007-2011 Planning Period:

- Secure sufficient funding from Erie County to sustain the Library System, meet or exceed New York State standards and advance essential service improvements
- Research and write grants to address service priorities
- Identify new corporate sponsors and partners
- Implement full-scale recruitment of volunteers in concert with Board-adopted Volunteer Program Policy
- Conduct annual review of all fines and fees for adjustments as necessary
- Host annual fundraising event during National Library Week
- Implement direct mail solicitations through Development Office

Human Resources Initiatives

In September 2002, a Benefits Committee consisting of trustees and staff from B&ECPL and various contracting libraries assembled to standardize benefits for contract library personnel who are not represented by employee bargaining units. This committee identified, defined and revised pertinent terms and

conditions and developed an Employee Benefits Package that was transmitted to the B&ECPL Board of Trustees in late 2003. This long awaited and often requested agreement explains various employee benefits afforded to contracting library blue- and white-collar full-time, part-time and regular part-time employees. Such benefits are funded annually by B&ECPL but have been administered inconsistently in some locations. In January 2004, the Employee Benefits Package became a part of B&ECPL's annual agreement with all contracting libraries.

Activity for 2007-2011 Planning Period:

- Revisit and update Employee Benefits Package

In 2002, B&ECPL launched the Process Improvement Project (PIP) to determine which activities are being performed by which public service titles and the amount of time staff spends on each activity. The goal has been to streamline processes and procedures, allocate resources to optimal benefit and establish System-wide job descriptions. Public service employees (full-time, part-time and regular part-time) in all locations and departments participated. An imposing quantity of valid data was collected, and analysis continues.

PIP data can continue to assist in realigning staff and improving operational efficiency at all locations. (An important by-product of PIP is the recognition that volunteers play a significant role at various B&ECPL locations. While the roles of paid employees within the System are invaluable, areas where volunteers can be used, without jeopardizing service quality or infringing on "bargained work," will be implemented.)

Activities for 2007-2011 Planning Period:

- Utilize PIP data to realign staff assignments and improve operational efficiency at all locations
- Implement full-scale recruitment of volunteers in concert with Board-adopted Volunteer Program Policy

Future Planning Efforts

Throughout the five-year planning cycle trustees and staff must regularly return to this document, not only to determine whether its objectives are being met, but also to reflect on changing circumstances (both internal and external) and how they influence both the content of the plan, the Library's fundamental mission and its ability to meet key goals.

At times, it may be necessary to identify and engage outside experts to assist in data collection and analysis or other professional consulting services. The compressed timeframe for the development of this plan and the lack of financial resources dedicated to its creation precluded the retention of such consulting services. This should not suggest, however, that those services would not have great value at the appropriate time, when sufficient funds can be identified.

Activities for 2007-2011 Planning Period:

- Revisit planning document annually to measure progress and refine objectives
- Seek professional consulting services (as needed) to meet planning goals

Closing

Whether one attributes the quote to French poet Paul Valery or baseball legend Yogi Berra, the fact remains: “The future isn’t what it used to be.”

We live in a world where the latest techniques and technology become outmoded almost before they reach the showroom floor. Nevertheless, we must not let that deter us from using those tools to address the immediate needs of our patrons and planning to address the needs that are just around the corner.

No one can predict the future, but we are destined to live there. The Library’s best course is to keep its plans flexible, its eyes focused on its mission of service to the community and the imagination of its staff, trustees and other stakeholders open to the infinite possibilities that lie ahead.

Appendix A

Mission Statement and Principles

Mission Statement

Connecting our diverse community with library resources that enrich, enlighten and entertain.

Principles

The Buffalo and Erie County Public Library will:

1. Provide open, equal and free access to information in accordance with the American Library Association's "Library Bill of Rights."
2. Deliver timely, confidential and customer-oriented service to meet the informational, recreational and educational needs of the community.
3. Promote lifelong learning by encouraging all children and adults in their enjoyment of reading and discovery.
4. Contribute to the region's economic vitality by assisting individuals, businesses and government as they pursue better jobs and economic growth.
5. Create and maintain an environment that attracts, develops and encourages a diverse and skilled staff.
6. Listen to the entire community in pursuit of the Library's Mission.
7. Manage resources effectively and be accountable to its funding sources.
8. Pursue the private and public funding necessary to fulfill the Library's Mission.

The Mission Statement and Principles form the basis for decisions that affect the daily operation of B&ECPL and those that shape future goals and objectives. In adopting these, the Board of Trustees recognizes and upholds the American Library Association's Library Bill of Rights.

Library Bill of Rights

The American Library Association affirms that all libraries are forums for information and ideas, and that the following basic policies should guide their services.

I. Books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves. Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation.

II. Libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues. Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.

III. Libraries should challenge censorship in the fulfillment of their responsibility to provide information and enlightenment.

IV. Libraries should cooperate with all persons and groups concerned with resisting abridgment of free expression and free access to ideas.

V. A person's right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views.

VI. Libraries which make exhibit spaces and meeting rooms available to the public they serve should make such facilities available on an equitable basis, regardless of the beliefs or affiliations of individuals or groups requesting their use.

Appendix B

Survey Results

For six weeks during July and August of 2006, B&ECPL posted an online survey of patron preferences on the Library's website. A paper version of one component was distributed to all locations, so patrons could complete it manually and return it to the Library for tabulation.

This admittedly unscientific survey yielded useful insights, and many of the findings are consistent with various scientifically valid studies conducted previously, including some cited in "Acknowledgements" below as well as focus groups and phone surveys conducted for B&ECPL by Insight Associates several years ago.

Some general observations must be made.

First, 85% of survey participants believe the Library deserves a restoration of some Erie County property tax funding — from as modest an increase as \$5 more per year to as much as \$25 or more per year, based on the average property tax assessed on a \$100,000 dwelling. Of all those who believe restorations are in order, 68% (57.6% of total respondents) believe the increase should be at least \$25 more per year.

Patrons clearly indicated that what they want from their library, first and foremost, is more new library materials. Their next preferences are for improved hours, friendly, responsive staff and more programs for children, teens and adults. As the Library plans for the future, these priorities must be kept in mind when making decisions regarding financial and human resource allocations.

When we consider the importance of improved hours, we also must remember that a respectable percentage of patrons who participated in the survey (35.9%) stressed their preference for weeknight hours as the most convenient time to visit their library. Future schedules must emphasize weeknight access, including the coordination of hours among libraries that serve contiguous communities.

In planning new library buildings or renovations of current facilities, it seems clear, despite some assertions to the contrary, that most patrons want convenient parking more than any other feature cited in the survey. An inviting atmosphere ranked second among preferences, followed by adequate lighting and climate control.

The Library plans to conduct additional surveys in the future, online, by phone and on paper to assist in evaluating resources and services and to plan for new means and methods of serving the people of Buffalo and Erie County better.

Survey results follow on pages 28 through 32.

When is the most convenient time for you to use the library?

No. of Replies	Saturdays	Sundays	Weekday Mornings	Weekday Afternoons	Weekday Evenings
1109	226	101	150	234	398
%	20.4%	9.1%	13.5%	21.1%	35.9%

In 2006, the average \$100,000 property in Erie County contributes \$72 per year for library services. This is down from \$105 per year in 2000, drastically reducing materials, hours and programs. How much would you be willing to restore?

No. of Replies	\$5.00	\$10.00	\$25.00	More than \$25.00	No Restoration	No Response
1134	101	209	288	365	124	47
%	8.9%	18.4%	25.4%	32.2%	10.9%	4.1%

Which 3 features are most important to a library building? Select your top three choices.

No. of Choices Selected	Accessibility for Disabled	Adequate Lighting	Available Meeting Room	Climate Control	Close to Public Transportation	Comfortable Seating	Convenient Parking	Inviting Atmosphere
3124	260	447	53	441	211	311	730	671
%	8.3%	14.3%	1.7%	14.1%	6.8%	10.0%	23.4%	21.5%

What should the library do to improve its technology resources? Select your top three choices.

No. of Choices Selected	Additional Hardware	Additional Software Programs	Laptops for Loan	More Computers	Online Library Payments	Technology Training	Wireless Access
2740	232	356	229	497	438	463	525
%	8.5%	13.0%	8.4%	18.1%	16.0%	16.9%	19.2%

What type of materials should the library add to its collection?

Material	No. of Replies	Yes	No	No Opinion
Bestsellers	1055	890	40	125
	%	84.4%	3.8%	11.8%
Other Adult Fiction	1053	884	33	136
	%	84.0%	3.1%	12.9%
Other Adult Nonfiction	1010	805	129	76
	%	79.7%	12.8%	7.5%
DVDs	591	429	80	82
	%	72.6%	13.5%	13.9%
Music CDs	1046	712	120	214
	%	68.1%	11.5%	20.5%
Children's Material	1028	757	98	173
	%	73.6%	9.5%	16.8%
Young Adult Material	1012	819	28	165
	%	80.9%	2.8%	16.3%
Audio Books on CD	1073	716	228	129
	%	66.7%	21.2%	12.0%
Magazines/Newspapers	1001	671	210	120
	%	67.0%	21.0%	12.0%

What type of adult programs would you like the library to offer?

Program	No. of Replies	Yes	No	No Opinion
Author Visits	1031	650	134	247
	%	63.0%	13.0%	24.0%
Book Discussions	1016	603	129	284
	%	59.4%	12.7%	28.0%
Computer Training	1032	694	126	212
	%	67.2%	12.2%	20.5%

Instructional	1014	640	192	182
	%	63.1%	18.9%	17.9%
Literacy	1012	740	78	194
	%	73.1%	7.7%	19.2%
Public Performances	993	409	278	306
	%	41.2%	28.0%	30.8%
Small Business Training	982	378	268	336
	%	38.5%	27.3%	34.2%
Literary Lectures	1008	552	229	227
	%	54.8%	22.7%	22.5%
Poetry Readings	997	378	323	296
	%	37.9%	32.4%	29.7%
Concerts	1004	406	336	262
	%	40.4%	33.5%	26.1%

What type of children's programs would you like the library to offer?

Program	No. of Replies	Yes	No	No Opinion
Baby Lap Time	963	320	204	439
	%	33.2%	21.2%	45.6%
Toddler Time	991	540	102	349
	%	54.5%	10.3%	35.2%
Preschool Story Hour	1015	700	37	278
	%	69.0%	3.6%	27.4%
Pajama Time Stories	983	467	148	368
	%	47.5%	15.1%	37.4%
Literacy	1001	686	74	241
	%	68.5%	7.4%	24.1%
Homework Help	1005	659	109	237
	%	65.6%	10.8%	23.6%

Special Events	905	539	71	295
	%	59.6%	7.8%	32.6%
Summer Activities	1015	771	42	202
	%	76.0%	4.1%	19.9%
Author Visits	966	571	136	259
	%	59.1%	14.1%	26.8%
Computer Training	993	551	178	264
	%	55.5%	17.9%	26.6%

What type of teen programs would you like the library to offer?

Program	No. of Replies	Yes	No	No Opinion
Computer Training	1003	589	164	250
	%	58.7%	16.4%	24.9%
Literacy	1004	725	80	199
	%	72.2%	8.0%	19.8%
Homework Help	1010	719	118	173
	%	71.2%	11.7%	17.1%
Special Events	992	601	117	274
	%	60.6%	11.8%	27.6%
Summer Activities	991	689	89	213
	%	69.5%	9.0%	21.5%
Author Visits	989	571	144	274
	%	57.7%	14.6%	27.7%
Poetry	980	469	178	333
	%	47.9%	18.2%	34.0%
Book Discussions	994	620	116	258
	%	62.4%	11.7%	26.0%
Gaming Competitions	976	366	367	243
	%	37.5%	37.6%	24.9%

Online Databases

	No. of Replies	Yes	No		
Do you know what an online database is?	1153	1045	108		
	%	90.6%	9.4%		
How often do you use the library's online databases?	No. of Replies	Daily	Weekly	Infrequently	Never
	1083	95	395	420	173
	%	8.8%	36.5%	38.8%	16.0%
	No. of Replies	Yes	No		
Do you usually find information through the online databases that is helpful?	983	801	182		
	%	81.5%	18.5%		

Rank the following library resources or services in the terms of their importance to you.

No.	Average Rank (2066 responses)	Valued Service
1	3.0	New Library Materials
2	3.8	Friendly Responsive Staff
3	4.1	Improved Hours of Service
4	5.3	Programs for Children, Teens and Adults
5	5.4	Comfortable, Accessible Buildings
6	5.7	Access to Computers and the Internet
7	6.2	Online Databases and Electronic Subscriptions
8	6.9	Computer Training Classes
9	7.0	Outreach Services to At-Risk Youth, Persons with Disabilities and Geographically Isolated
10	7.6	Rare Books

Appendix C

Free Direct Access Plan

In Fulfillment of Commissioner's Regulation: 90.3 (a) through (d) (4)

The Regents Commission on Library Services requires public library systems in the State of New York to include in their service plans a provision guaranteeing free use of library resources to people residing within the System's boundaries. Free direct access is not an issue with the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library (B&ECPL) System due to the nature of the System and how it operates. The following plan explains in detail the B&ECPL's history and present practice of free direct access to library resources for all the residents of Erie County and its commitment to continuing and improving on that principle in the 21st century.

The plan follows the "Outline and Guidelines for Developing a Free Direct Access Plan under Commissioner's Regulations 90.3" provided in March 1999.

As defined in section 90.3 of the Regulations of the Commissioner of Education, free direct access is the ability of an individual, who resides within the boundaries of the B&ECPL System and who has a valid borrower's card issued by this System, or any contracting library in the System, to borrow materials for home use directly from the premises of any library that contracts with the B&ECPL System on the same basis as that specified for cardholders in each individual library.

1.) According to the 1953 special legislation, chapter 768, that created the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library, the System Board of Trustees "may contract with the trustees of any free library within the county, registered by the Regents, or with any municipal or district body having control of such library, to furnish library privileges to the people of the county, under such terms and conditions as may be stated in such contract..."

The Buffalo & Erie County Public Library Board of Trustees contracts annually with 22 libraries serving the residents of Erie County. Free direct access is a matter of the contract.

In paragraph first of the annual contract, the contracting libraries agree to "furnish free library privileges to the people of the County of Erie." Note that this is an all-encompassing statement giving the residents of the county equal access to any of the 37 library buildings comprising the B&ECPL.

Paragraph second continues the enforcement of free direct access when it states "The books, pamphlets, periodicals, audio/video items and other materials constituting the circulating and reference library of the [contract library] shall be loaned in accordance with the rules and regulations of the B&ECPL, presently in force or as amended, to any person holding a library card duly issued by the B&ECPL or any other library within the County of Erie, which, by contract with the B&ECPL, has agreed to furnish library privileges to the people of the County of Erie.

Cementing this policy of free direct access, paragraph fifth says “The B&ECPL shall furnish to the [contract library] all books, pamphlets, periodicals, audio/video and other library material...All such purchases of books, pamphlets, periodicals, library materials and equipment of every nature and description whatsoever shall become the property of the County of Erie or the B&ECPL provided, however, that the [contract library] shall have the custody and use thereof so long as it shall continue to render public library service to the people of the County of Erie.”

Further, the contract requires in paragraph sixth that “the printed books, pamphlets and other documents constituting the circulating and reference library of the [contract library] shall be made available for use and distribution by other libraries within the County of Erie, which, by agreement with said B&ECPL, have contracted to furnish library privileges to the people of Erie County.”

In addition, B&ECPL provides service via libraries at the County Correctional Facility, Holding Center and Home and Infirmary. The B&ECPL provides library service to the other correctional facilities at Wende, Collins and Gowanda through grants. Library services throughout the county are free to residents who abide by B&ECPL rules.

2.) No contract library has withdrawn from the System and there are no public or free association libraries in Erie County, outside of the Native American reservations, that do not contract with B&ECPL. While not part of the System’s chartered service area, residents of the Tonawanda and Cattaraugus Reservations in Erie County have free direct access to any of B&ECPL’s resources.

3.) Because of B&ECPL’s inherent policy of free direct access, there are no “serious inequities and hardships” with regard to this policy.

4.) “Excessive borrowing” is not a problem since all residents are subject to the same borrowing privileges, and the contract designates that the service area, for all libraries in the System, is the entire county.

5a.) B&ECPLm is chartered to serve Erie County. Because of the contract, all areas of the county receive library service even if there are no library buildings within the municipality.

The Ewell Free Library in Alden is chartered to serve the village of Alden and the Angola Public Library is chartered to serve the village of Angola. In reality, the Ewell Free Library serves the entire town of Alden as well as any other Erie County residents who choose to use it. The same is true of the Angola Public Library with regard to the town of Evans and the county as a whole.

The towns of Brant, Colden, Holland, Sardinia and Wales do not have library buildings. Their residents are served by libraries in neighboring towns or in any Erie County community that the residents of those towns choose to use.

The Central Library and eight branch libraries located within the city limits provide library service to the residents of Buffalo. The 1953 special legislation creating B&ECPL established representation for the City of Buffalo on the System Board. Buffalo does not

have a separate chartered library with an independent library board and does not contract with the System.

5b.) The 1953 special legislation establishing this library system gives Erie County the authority to “levy and raise by taxation and appropriation such sums as shall be necessary to establish, equip and maintain such library and branches...” An equalized countywide tax supports all the libraries of the B&ECPL. Thus, all property owners in Erie County are contributing equitably to libraries. Each contracting library’s budget request is included in the System’s operating budget request. The contracting library’s budget sum for the year is part of the contract. Local libraries may raise and appropriate funds from other sources to supplement funds derived from Erie County.

5c-e.) The municipalities in Erie County without a chartered library are receiving library service from B&ECPL as detailed above. In any of these municipalities, should the population increase to the point where a library building is warranted, and if the community expressed an interest in funding the construction of a library, the System would respond accordingly. Currently, the low population density in these towns does not justify the establishment of a new library and precludes designating an optimal location for a library building.

6.) B&ECPL does not require any modifications to the plan for unrestricted direct access.

7 & 8.) As the B&ECPL’s plan for free direct access is included in the annual agreement between the System and the contracting libraries, those libraries are bound by the contract to abide by the free direct access plan. Contracting libraries have been invited to raise questions and provide comments regarding the development of the System plan of service by direct invitation and through an open public review process which affords all residents of Erie County an opportunity to participate.

Acknowledgements

The development of the preceding plan relies on many source documents, data gathering and interactions with public, trustees and staff.

The prevailing three-year, strategic plan, *Breaking New Ground: A Blueprint for Strengthening a Community Through Exceptional Library Service* (2004-2006), the B&ECPL Five-Year Plan of Service for New York State (2002-2006) and the B&ECPL Technology Plan (2004-2007) provided a firm foundation on which to build this new plan of service. Also of significant value was *The Buffalo & Erie County Public Library, 1998 to 2008: Revisiting the "Cohen Study" and Redefining B&ECPL's Future*, a four-year plan adopted by the Library Board in August 2005 to meet the requirements of the Erie County Fiscal Stability Authority.

B&ECPL staff relied on various published reports on libraries, information access and public opinion. OCLC's *Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources* (2005) was invaluable in this regard, as was an audio conference sponsored by the Urban Libraries Council, "Fresh Eye on the Business of Libraries: Customers, Service Models and Brand," which dissected the OCLC study on April 19, 2006. In June, Public Agenda with support from the Americans for Libraries Council with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation released *Long Overdue: A Fresh Look at Public Attitudes About Libraries in the 21st Century*, a public opinion study that reports the results of a national survey of the general public as well as interviews with national and local civic leaders. These preceding publications should be required reading for those involved in library planning today and in the future.

Various individuals contributed their professional expertise to assist staff in identifying and articulating the Library's future needs, including Richard Panz (Panz Library Consulting) who is cited above in the Governance section and library futurist Stephen Abram, Vice-President for Innovation for Sirsi-Dynix, who spent an intense day and a half with B&ECPL trustees and staff, opening their eyes to some of the amazing changes on the horizon for both library personnel and the public at-large.