

Hardin County Public Library Strategic Plan – 2022-2024

History of Hardin County Public Library Funding:

On November 4, 1958, Hardin County voters established a county library under KRS173.310 and is funded under Statute 173.360 which states, "...it shall be not less than five cents nor more than fifteen cents on each one hundred dollars' worth of property assessed for local taxation." In 1965, Fiscal Court changed the way it determined the funding for the library based on the Kentucky Rollback Law which was created as a reaction to the change in how property was assessed. Prior to 1965, property in Hardin County and much of the state was assessed at 30% of its fair cash value. In 1980, the library board sought financial relief for funding that they felt had not been correctly appropriated to the library from the tax revenue collected for Fiscal Court. Judge William Cooper ruled against the library board and determined "that the calculation for the library is to divide the total property assessment figure for the year by 100 and multiply the remainder by 10% of the county's actual tax rated for the same year." This has dropped the library's appropriation from the 5 cents per \$100 of assessed value to a little over 1.5 cents per \$100 of assessed value.

In recent years, the Hardin County Public Library has tried twice to have Fiscal Court establish a special library taxing district in accordance with KRS.67.715 with a rate of 3 cents per \$100. In 2015, the proposal was removed from the agenda due to lack of support. In 2018, the proposal was presented again and voted on but failed to pass with a 4-4 tie. There was one vacancy on the court at that time.

Since that time the director, staff, and trustees have attempted to plan for the future based on our current funding situation while still providing a wide range of library materials in a variety of formats, programs, community space, public events, and effective staff assistance to our citizens.

Mission:

The library will provide excellent library services and materials to the people of Hardin County in an equitable and confidential manner using our available resources and partnering with other agencies to maximize opportunities for our library patrons.

Vision:

The library will be the welcoming heart of our community and serve as a learning center to encourage the joy of reading, lifelong learning, and the exploration of creativity, information, and knowledge for all ages and cultures.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats:

Informal surveys have been conducted and citizen input has been organized and shared. Circulation reports detailing program attendance, public computer usage, meeting room usage, new patron registrations, and, most importantly, circulation of materials have been carefully examined. Hours of heavy and light library usage have been studied. These reports are tools used to determine the best allocation of resources in each department and for each facility. Cost cutting measures have been strengthened and every expenditure is scrutinized. The director has sought advice from peers, both in Kentucky and outside Kentucky, for ways to reduce costs and still provide materials, programs, and services to the public. Alternative methods of providing library services have been discussed including reducing hours, prioritizing services, and increasing outreach vehicles hours on the road. The board and staff decided to emphasize and allocate resources to areas that were most consistently used by our patrons and seemed to provide the best cost per beneficiary. While we listened to patron requests, we also kept in mind the need for resources, available hours, locations, and delivery methods for those most in need of our services who might not be as vocal or responsive to our inquiries.

State Aid to Public Libraries was eliminated for FY 2020-2021 and FY 2021-2022. Combined with an increasing lack of patron usage at the North Branch location, the decision was made by the board to consolidate all materials and programming under one facility in Elizabethtown in September, 2020.

Outreach: Our focus and priority for 2020 and 2021 has been our Outreach Department which currently consists of two bookmobiles and an outreach van staffed by 30 hour per week employees, each working 4 days a week.

Our Outreach Department is also supplementing preschools who do not have an abundance of funds for books and learning materials for their very young children. Book kits, with carefully selected items, are rotated among twenty centers every two weeks and are well used by the child care centers. A new program, called "Teach Me Totes" are subject specific items placed in canvas totes and serve as supplemental learning materials for these child care centers.

Our Outreach Department has redefined its mission due to the North Branch closing and to the limitations imposed by the pandemic. Our library's definition of outreach suggests offering the library to the community of Hardin County in relevant and culturally-responsive ways, while providing positive marketing and promotion of library programs and services. Outreach should be accomplished in a manner that allows the community opportunities to realize the benefits of using the library. Efforts should not only focus on reaching the underserved but also on providing as equitable of service as possible to all individuals and groups. The ultimate goal in reaching the public with programs and services is to increase patronage both in and out of the physical library walls.

In 2020, Fiscal Court allocated funds for a new Bookmobile which was purchased in August of 2021. This vehicle will serve alongside the current bookmobile and the outreach van but will house a larger collection and provide seating for step-on programs for small groups of children. The Outreach Department implemented a summer reading program in 2021 to include outdoor pop up libraries throughout the county. The stops included the Farmer's Market, Freeman Lake Park, and Colvin Community Center and most were well attended. The current bookmobile has been totaled and salvaged and will need to be replaced within the year. Our county is the 4th largest in the state with 623.28 square miles. Citizens live in many outlying areas as well as in the larger cities and towns.

Staffing: As in most service industries, the largest expense of our library system has always been personnel. The majority of our staff are now part-time. The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic have been long lasting and the quest to find suitable employees for entry level positions has been difficult. The threat of \$15 per hour minimum wage would further deplete our limited resources causing us to cut back in areas of collection and operations.

Library hours have been reduced and staff have taken on additional responsibilities. The library works with ECTC's student work-study program to help staff the main library's circulation desk. In non-pandemic times, the library has between 12-15 adult volunteer programmers who work at no charge. The library also has 5-8 volunteers who clean materials, shelf books and shelf read, assist with promotions, and do other assigned tasks in the main library. The Youth Department also has teen volunteers who help with children's programming.

Covid has significantly impacted our staff with many part time workers taking other jobs or returning to college. We saw many full time employees retire or take other higher paying jobs. We were unable to

have any volunteer workers onsite due to Covid restrictions. All programming was virtual for children, teens, adults, and our outreach patrons. As child care centers and classrooms re-opened, Outreach provided even more Book Boxes and Teach Me Totes. We constructed and distributed Take Home Crafts for children to do with their families at home. We shared our programs via YouTube Channels and Facebook Live presentations. We offered curbside pick-up service and will continue to do so for those who request it. We also implemented Outreach Doorstep Delivery service which is contact free for our staff and home-bound patrons. We are prepared to follow these “contact-free” guidelines when restrictions are mandated by the State of Kentucky or strongly recommended by the Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives.

Materials: Programming and circulation are directly linked. When programming stopped due to Covid, circulation dropped. Even though we offered curbside pick-up and outreach drop off during the pandemic, we found our patrons were able to rely heavily on digital materials. The library ranks high statewide in the percentage of total circulation that is in electronic format...it is 49% in the 2021 Statistical Report. We allow all Hardin County students the use of our digital collection and databases with a student digital only card and through the SORA app implemented by our local school systems.

We significantly reduced the number of print materials purchased and stopped all print magazines while we were closed for Covid. We converted the North Branch collection to the Roving Collection which now fulfills the requests of both the outreach and library patrons. OverDrive has expanded their online magazine collection so we will no longer offer print magazines.

Operations: Building Maintenance continues to be a large portion of the annual library budget’s expenditure. A separate account has been established with funds from donations, gifts, and funds carried over at the end of the fiscal year. The library building was constructed in 2002 and still has the original interior paint, carpet, shelving and furniture. A complete refurbishing and expansion is required. We have repurposed spaces throughout our building to provide meeting areas and programming areas but often these events disrupt regular library operations and are no longer practical. The library ranks high statewide in number of programs offered and in the number of attendees in both children’s and adults programs.

The library is woefully short on square footage based on the KPLA Essential Benchmark. Our per capita funding is also very low, so although we have made multiple efforts to increase our local funding, state assistance is crucial. A proposed expansion project will add almost 9,000 square feet to our library. This square footage will increase our children’s space and add areas for adult programming, outreach collections, and staff work space. We are applying for public library facility construction funds through KDLA for 2022.

Needs: A Building Maintenance Committee has been in place the last few years to prioritize repairs, furnishings, maintenance, and landscape issues. This committee continues to look at ways to improve and repurpose our existing space, while trying to keep up with repairs, maintenance and furnishings. This committee is dedicated to exploring ideas to reflect the best and future use of the facility and how it might be impacted with future funding increases or decreases.

The Library Director met with our neighbor, the Central Kentucky Community Foundation Director, to ask that the property lines be redrawn to better reflect the library’s ownership and responsibility for upkeep of the parking lot. The boundary line between the two properties should also be examined in light of their new construction and our proposed expansion. Our parking lot needs to be resurfaced and

restriped. We are changing our interior lights to LED. The exterior building lights and parking lot lights were converted to LED in 2021. Our outdoor areas, especially the Brenda Addington Drane Amphitheater continue to serve our patrons well. In 2021, we converted most of our flower beds in the parking lot to grass to save on landscaping costs

Technology continues to change and we are not up to date. Hardware and software upgrades are needed yet no funds have been set aside or budgeted.

Our Teen Group is growing and needs a dedicated space away from the Children's Department. This area needs to share three distinct spaces: a media area, a social area, and a study area. Our children's department is extremely busy and also needs more space for programming, planning and preparation, shelving, parent-child computer areas, a Mother's Room, and family style restrooms with a changing table. They also need more storage, an office, and exits to the children's garden and amphitheater. We would like to modify our proposed plans to include a covered area for outdoor programming and a drive through window for materials to be picked up and dropped off.

We need to provide clean, comfortable, safe space that is conducive to learning. We value the individuality of our patrons and are committed to children and youth. We continue to serve as a community hub. We are a co-applicant with Woodland Elementary School and a community partner with New Highland Elementary School for their 21st Century Community Learning Center Program. Many visit our library exclusively for programs and meetings. 5253 Design Group has provided us with a feasibility study for a future addition and renovation of the main branch facility so that we are now eligible for a state construction grant in 2022.

Goals and Objectives:

Plan for future use of facility and vehicles to match patrons' needs and expectations. We would like to have some local government financial support to use as leverage for grants.

Examine our collection of materials to make sure they follow today's guidelines of equality, diversity, and inclusion.

Continue to apply for grants and donations in areas of construction, collection development, vehicle purchase, technology, personnel, and any resources of value to our patrons.

Consider more efficient delivery of library materials to patrons whether electronically or through vehicles, including using ARPA funds to purchase a library locker for the Radcliff area.

As our county's population grows, consider purchasing a second library locker to serve the Glendale area in the event of industrial expansion.

Promote library services in an attempt to reach nonusers and those most in need of our services.

Continue to partner with community members, agencies, and businesses to pool resources that benefit the citizens of our growing county.

Adopted September 9, 2021