

**Introduction:** The leadership of the Free Public Library of Hamilton Township believes that a successful strategic plan provides the framework for organizational change, service enhancement, and innovation to guide us to be the best possible library for the community. It is readily apparent that Hamilton treasures its library and views it as a valuable resource. Use continues to rise every year. In 2010, the Library hosted over 41,000 computer users and 500,000 visits to the Library (or everybody in the township visited the library more than 4 times.) 57,200 reference questions were answered. 36,690 Hamilton residents hold library cards (or about 40% of the entire population). Book circulation was 210,000 (Or everybody borrowed over 2-1/2 books last year.) In addition, over 25,000 people attended meetings in library meeting rooms in 2010. (Or almost 1/3 of the population came to the library for a non-traditional reason).

Hamilton Township and the Friends of the Hamilton Public library provide robust financial support and the Library is fortunate to be the recipient of many private monetary and property donations, both restricted and unrestricted. We are committed to providing the best possible service to our community because it deserves nothing less. Over the next five years, the Library will continue to enrich its service offerings while examining and improving its internal processes in order to ensure the best allocation of resources and the best delivery of services to a demanding public.

**The Library's core values are:** *Quality, Innovation, Inclusion, Integrity, Diversity, Stewardship, Tolerance, Collaboration, Respect, and Community.* These values are incorporated into the vision, mission and strategic initiatives as well as the goals and objectives. They are the bedrock of this plan.

**Our Vision:** Hamilton Public Library embraces the rich heritage and vibrant future of our community. We aspire to be the best possible library for Hamilton. We create opportunities for our residents to participate, connect and discover by:

- Encouraging lifelong learning.
- Responding to the needs of our diverse community.
- Ensuring freedom of access to information.
- Offering space for people and ideas to come together.
- Providing materials and programs that entertain and inspire.
- Maintaining excellent stewardship of the physical and financial assets entrusted to the Library.
- Committing to excellent service to the community.

**Our Mission:** The Hamilton Public Library enhances the quality of life in our community by providing the resources and services for lifelong learning and enjoyment, the space and opportunities to gather and connect, and by fostering a love of reading.

## **Our Background and Library Profile as of Fiscal and Calendar Year 2011:**

**GOVERNANCE:** The library municipal library is governed by a nine member Board of Trustees, seven appointed by the Mayor with consent of Council and one designee each of the Mayor and Superintendent of Schools. The Board has a Committee on Policy.

**FACILITY:** The library building is a 55,000 square foot, standalone, three-level structure. Groundbreaking was in 1973. The Library grounds are used as an integral part of the Township's efforts to foster the arts.

**HOURS OR OPERATION:** Current operating hours are 9 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday and 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Friday and Saturday.

**CURRENT SERVICES:** The Library offers traditional circulation and reference services; programs for children and teens; online data bases and instructional, test preparation software; faxing and notary service; online Internet access (filtered and not filtered); and color and black and white printing. Wi-Fi is accessible everywhere. All online services are available with a library card all the time from any computer. Meeting rooms with a computer projector and public address systems are available for large and small groups.

**STAFFING:** Current personnel are Director and Assistant Director, eight full-time librarians, two part-time librarians, sixteen full-time clerks, a part-time clerk, a part-time Library Assistant and 3 full-time maintainers. All Library employees are unionized and contracted with their Township employee counterparts. The library contracts with the Township for legal, accounting, and human resources support. Technology is maintained by a consultant with Microsoft and Cisco certifications.

**FUNDING:** Annual funding is over \$3.27 million. Funding of needed equipment is supplemented by the Friends of the Library book sales. The Library has no grant funding but is the recipient of approximately \$10,000 per year in restricted donations which are maintained in a trust account. The Library has designated over 75% of its surplus funds to future capital improvements.

**Our Levels of Service and Planning Indicators:** The Library's level of service and trends in specific areas is as follows:

- The Library had over 500,000 visitors in 2010. 36,690 people held Library cards.
- Circulation has gone from 196,000 to 210,000 in six years.
- Computer use in 2010 reached 41,000 users and continues to average 154 sessions per day. It is anticipated to grow by over 10% per year.
- Most user Website visits are not tracked; however, The World Book on-line experienced over 17,000 "hits" in its first 18 months of availability and reports from the New Learning Experience show reveal that demand is consistently increasing.

- Use of online data bases has increased by 15% over the past year and is anticipated to grow.
- Reference questions in the last three years went from 54,330 to 55,837 to 57,209 or an increase of 5%.
- Program attendance in the last three years went from 23,798 to 20,729\* to 27,970 or an increase of 18%.
- Library visitors in the last three years went from 447,000 to 468,800 to 500,290 or an increase of 12%.
- Children attending the Summer Reading Program in the last three years went from 622 to 158\* to 617.\*
- Meeting room facilities usage in 2010 was over 25,000 people. Demands for reservations cannot be met.
- Over 600 people have registered requests for on-line book services.  
(\* Safety Town was not offered in 2009 accounting for the decrease)

## **Strategic Initiatives:**

### **Strategic initiative #1: Service Excellence**

*The Hamilton Public Library exists to meet the needs of the community. We are focused on the customer experience and anticipate user needs. We provide consistent, convenient, friendly, knowledgeable services that consistently result in solutions to user problems. We recognize that an important part of our job is to communicate effectively so that the community is aware of and can take full advantage of library services, resources and programs. We actively seek out best practices and adapt them to the needs of Hamilton.*

### **Goal: Offer customer-focused service throughout the organization.**

Objectives:

- Evaluate workflow, staffing levels and budget allocation to maximize customer satisfaction with resources and services.
- Evaluate self-service options for optimal performance.
- Provide understandable, attractive, visible signage.
- Share a clear definition of service excellence with users.
- Evaluate customer service.

### **Goal: Strive to be a leader in service excellence among libraries in New Jersey and nationwide**

Objectives:

- Incorporate continuous improvement and ongoing evaluation into all library operations and services.
- Gather, evaluate and implement best practices from other libraries and adapt them to our operation as appropriate.
- Create innovative services and programs and share with other libraries and our community.

## **Strategic Initiative #2: Access to Information**

*The free exchange of ideas and access to information are fundamental tenets of a democratic society.* The library is committed to the principles of intellectual freedom. We provide free access to information and resources that our users' need and want. We respect and protect the privacy and confidentiality of our users. We strictly adhere to laws affecting us, library usage, and information access and usage.

### **Goal: Make the Library easier to use for everyone.**

Objectives:

- Conduct a self-study for policy, economic, language and physical barriers to reduce or eliminate barriers to access.
- Explore techniques to better market and promote the collection.
- Reach out to special client groups such as youth, teens, seniors, persons with disabilities, English language learners, etc. to meet their needs.
- Identify non-users and their needs.

### **Goal: Increase staff and public awareness of what we do and what we have.**

Objectives:

- Create a public awareness plan that promotes services, materials and programs.
- Ensure that all staff is fully conversant with Hamilton Library policies and procedures.
- Share the library core values with staff and community.
- Improve and increase outreach efforts.

## **Strategic Initiative #3: Learning Organization**

*We believe that we provide the best possible library services when we are engaged in professional development.* We consciously and continuously seek to gain new knowledge and skills. We are in a state of continuous assessment and adaptation. Individual learning is continuous, knowledge is shared, and staff is encouraged to experiment, take risks and not fear failure. Staff respect and trust each other and engage in open, honest communication throughout the organization. Everyone's contribution is valued. There is a clear, shared, inspiring vision and a strong sense of community and shared purpose.

### **Goal: Be a responsive, evolving organization.**

Objectives:

- Establish institutional standards and expectations for communication, respect and conflict resolution throughout the organization.
- Recognize and reward exceptional individual and group performance, innovation, collaboration, creative problem-solving and continuous learning.
- Facilitate the career growth of high performing staff and provide all staff with the tools and educational opportunities required to develop new skills.
- Create the optimal workforce for the Library's future; identify appropriate workload staffing levels necessary for running operations; strive to attract and retain a staff that reflects the diversity of our community.

- Share knowledge throughout the organization and encourage staff to avail themselves of both onsite and offsite professional development opportunities.
- Actively practice open, honest communication.

**Goal: Share a clear, inspiring vision and purpose.**

Objectives:

- Ensure all staff understand and actively support organizational goals.
- Incorporate assessment, continuous improvement and planning for the future into everyday operations.

**Strategic Initiative #4: Lifelong Learning and Enjoyment**

*Hamilton has a proud heritage of diversity and inclusion, and is strongly committed to education and learning.* The Library has an important role in providing services and resources to people of all ages and abilities. We promote early literacy through innovative and creative children's programming. We work with educational institutions to ensure academic success for all. We reach out to teens, adults, seniors and special client groups to make sure we are meeting their needs. We instill a love of reading by demonstrating and communicating our own enthusiasm and joy. We provide materials, programs and resources that entertain, inspire and inform all members of the community.

**Goal: Promote literacy and the love of reading and learning for all ages.**

Objectives:

- Expand and evaluate outreach services for literacy.
- Develop opportunities for staff and public to cultivate and share their love of reading.
- Develop programs in support of and in coordination with the collection.

**Goal: Build, manage and evaluate our collection in order to meet the educational, recreational and cultural needs of the community.**

Objectives:

- Evaluate community and patron desires and make sure our collection reflects them.
- Define the role of the collection and the appropriate balance for types of materials, including formats, age levels and subjects.
- Provide easy user-focused access to the collection.

**Goal: Use technology to provide innovative library services and to reach out to remote users.**

Objectives:

- Explore the establishment of a virtual branch to focus our current online services into a unified approach.
- Evaluate our integrated library system to ensure optimum customer service and financial stewardship.
- Use the interactive potential of the catalog and website to get feedback from our users.

**Strategic Initiative #5: Cultural Center**

*Hamilton is a dynamic hub of cultural activities and civic engagement. The Library builds and engages in mutually beneficial relationships with other community groups and organizations to create a vibrant web of community activity. We are a full partner in finding solutions for community problems that are consistent with our Mission and willingly accept our role in community improvement and government. We are a physical place and a virtual destination where people and ideas connect. We are a repository of local history and heritage. We are a clearinghouse for community information.*

**Goal: Offer programming which serves the needs and interests of the Hamilton community.**

Objectives:

- Improve library-wide coordination, planning, marketing and evaluation of programming.
- Work in collaboration with other organizations (libraries, schools, businesses) and cultural institutions to develop, co-sponsor and publicize programs.

**Goal: Optimize the use of meeting rooms.**

Objectives:

- Create a centralized listing where all events and programs held in the Library can be posted.
- Communicate to the community the availability of and limitations on the use of meeting rooms.
- Evaluate and purchase room reservation software and train relevant staff in its optimum use.

**Strategic Initiative #6: Stewardship**

*The township of Hamilton, its residents and businesses provide us with the funds to operate the Library and expect us to maintain the highest levels of efficiency and integrity.*

We practice transparent governance and align our financial resources with our institutional goals and priorities. We recognize that our financial resources are finite and we actively pursue alternative sources of funding.

**Goal: Develop a comprehensive plan to maintain and upgrade library infrastructure (building, grounds, technology) to ensure safety, efficiency and the delivery of excellent library service. Balance opportunities for improvement against costs.**

Objective:

- Determine and plan for upkeep-, upgrade- and replacement-costs for all systems on a continuing basis.

**Goal: Reduce the environmental impact of the Library below current levels and be recognized as a community leader in this area.**

Objectives:

- Create an Environmental Task Force to explore energy efficiencies and ways to reduce the environmental impact of the Library.

**Goal: Create ways to reach patrons who cannot or do not visit the library.**

Objectives:

- Assess the population and needs of nondrivers and homebound residents.
- Create partnerships with government entities and nonprofit organizations to supply access to Library collections and services.
- Examine (and adjust as necessary) library hours to better meet the needs of our residents.
- Research the feasibility of purchasing a bookmobile and/ or technology to reach the homebound.

**Goal: Make the best use of available space.**

Objectives:

- Conduct regular usability studies and align spaces according to patron use.
- Evaluate the usage of lobby space and develop a plan for optimal use.

**Goal: Align our budget with institutional goals and ensure our priorities and our budget process is open and transparent to all.**

Objectives:

- Develop a budget process that is transparent and actively encourages staff input.
- Raise our cost consciousness and encourage staff participation in cost containment efforts.
- Demonstrate operating efficiencies to the community.

**Goal: Broaden our resources.**

Objectives:

- Develop a centrally coordinated volunteer program that includes training and recognition of volunteers.
- Explore ways to increase resources through community and library partnerships.
- Expand fundraising efforts.
- Explore the formation of a foundation and investigate entrepreneurial services that will increase financial resources.