

PLP Innovation and Technology Opportunity Grant Program Application

1. One paragraph project summary.

To meet expressed needs of the community, Contra Costa County Library is embarking on the Readers Initiative to reintroduce an important relationship between individuals and their fondest library memories (what the strategic plan refers to as the ‘evocative library’). By reestablishing this critical relationship the library will be well positioned to greet current and lapsed users while also creating relationships with new users. Central to this is making sure the library is a welcoming place in how it greets people and how it presents products and services. This grant will facilitate contracting with a library consultant to provide assessments and recommendations for the customer experience. The project includes implementation and staff training on best practices and will be made available to PLP members and other libraries.

2. Explain how this project fits with the library’s strategic directions.

Contra Costa County Library Strategic Plan 2017 included a significant amount of research on community needs and desires for library services. The library embarked on a 3-month research effort which yielded information from 28 town hall meetings, 278 key informant interviews and 4615 survey responses. Ranked first among community input was the need for the library to better promote its services. Tied for second place were open hours and improved library facilities. Many commented on how the library reminded them of a specific time and place in their lives and they wished the library still had this feel. Respondents spoke specifically of a place of joy and exploration which we refer to as the “evocative library”. This is the customer experience the library wishes to create and is reflected in the goals and objectives of the plan which are listed here. *Italics indicate those items directly related to the PLP Innovation grant.*

Goal One – the library ensures easy, equitable access to library services for all County residents.

Objective 1 – expand library service use by 25 percent in identified underserved populations in each community

Objective 2 – explore and pilot three new approaches for improving library hours, facilities and services

Goal Two - The library champions personal and community engagement in literacy and reading to enrich lives.

Objective 1 – Increase opportunities for literacy and lifelong learning by 25 percent

Objective 2 – expand knowledge of collections to increase circulation by 10 percent

Goal Three – The library delivers a consistent, high-quality and inviting experience at all points of contact

Objective 1 – Assess all facilities and develop methods to increase user satisfaction levels by 50 percent

Objective 2 – Enact a “yes-we-can” customer service plan to improve user satisfaction levels by 20 percent

Objective 3 - Develop and adopt technology to meet community needs

Goal Four – The library successfully promotes its value, programs and opportunities to the community

Like many libraries, Contra Costa County Library finds registered patrons and circulation trending downward since the Great Recession. As indicated above, the Readers Initiative positions the library to act on multiple goals and objectives to increase library use and knowledge of the collection while making the library facilities available to a wider audience. The Readers Initiative includes six key elements including promotion, library card drive, programs, community engagement, collections and facilities. While no element is considered greater than any other, the library has identified its facilities as being less than optimal for attracting and keeping users.

Over the past 5 years the library has embarked on “facility refreshes” which are small projects to update those facilities which have not had a remodel in several years. Community feedback on these projects has been overwhelmingly positive. Staff report how the community appreciates the library caring about their needs when in the library. City partners have been known to contribute towards the refresh projects when the library steps up first. Overall, the need for well-planned and maintained facilities is critical to attracting and keeping users.

3. A detailed description of the proposed project including the population served and the demographics of that population.

According to US Census data for 2016 and 2017, Contra Costa County has a population of over 1.1 million residents. The library, like all cities and county agencies, is acutely aware of underserved populations in West and Far East County. While the library acknowledges the central and south County cities are able to provide enhanced library support, the west and east have fewer resources to devote to library services. Compounding these economic inequities are the disparate library facilities with different abilities to serve the community.

Service Models

Service models include square footage, number of service desks within the building, number of exits, availability of self-checks. Walnut Creek Library (which opened in July 2010) has the most complex service model because it is a 2-story facility with six exits. The library has four staffed service points and four locations for patron self-service for checking out materials.

Age of Buildings

The average age of a library in Contra Costa County is 37 years. Crockett Library (an outlet) was built in 1914 while the new San Pablo Library opened in 2017. New libraries such as Walnut

Creek (2010) and Lafayette (2009) or recently remodeled libraries such as the San Ramon Library (2017), boast state-of-the-art service plans which highlight self-service models, wayfinding, and updated and rich collections.

With so many facility options, it is no wonder there is no consistent brand of Contra Costa County Library service plans. This project will allow us to work with industry leading consultants to create a customer experience to meet the direct needs of users.

The project will include identifying pilot libraries to serve as test cases for study and implementation of concepts. After a full study of physical spaces, a recommended standard customer experience will be adopted and funds (separate from this project) will be allocated for improvements. A pre-test survey will identify user experiences related to the facilities with a post-test survey to measure user satisfaction once improvements are made. Threaded through this will be staff training on space layout and messaging. All of these steps will go towards recreating the evocative library for those who have fond memories of the library of their youth. And will work towards establishing a library experience that will encourage lapsed and new users to give us a try.

4. Goals and objectives of the project.

Goal – Review and create standards for layout of furniture and collections to best guide the customer experience

- Secure consulting contract with industry expert in libraries and marketing
- Identify facilities to serve as pilot locations
- Create best practices and plan implementation of recommendations
- Create training materials for libraries to renew their physical spaces

Goal – Share findings and best practices with PLP members and other libraries.

- Report out at selected PLP events
- Submit conference proposal(s) to relevant library conferences and/or publications

5. Project timeline (activities).

All dates 2019 unless noted

January – Initiate scope of work and contract with space consultant

February – conduct survey “pre-test” of user impressions of library space

March – Consultant and Library Administration identify locations to serve as flagship libraries

May – Consultant report identifies best practices for library-wide implementation

June – Staff training on best practices to reinforce methods used to attract users

July/August – Best practices are put in place

August-November – Library allocates funding and places orders to implement key recommendations

February 2020 – Conduct survey “post-test” of user impressions of library space

6. Evaluation of the project.

The project will include user surveys of pre- and post-test experiences of library spaces. Using OrangeBoy, a data analytics firm with expertise working with public libraries, the library will reach out to current and lapsed users to ascertain a change in their perception of the library. If the Readers Initiative is successful then number of active users will increase and user satisfaction will trend upward.

7. Project budget. (Indirect costs are not allowed).

\$50,000 – consultant
\$15,000 BALIS
\$35,000 CCCLIB

8. Sustainability analysis.

Implementation of the PLP grant will have far reaching benefits. Following this project the library will allocate funds to implement the customer experience in pilot locations. Results of community input, pre- and post-tests of experiences and active user counts will inform continued rollout of the project. Tools produced for the project will reassure city partners that the library is a keen participant in vital services. Staff training in project methods will help them grow their confidence and abilities. Pre- and post-surveys will provide critical data for further implementation of the strategic plan. And PLP members and others will benefit from relevant work Contra Costa County Library does on behalf of all libraries through reporting out at PLP events and through presentation at library conferences and/or in library publications.