



# **STRATEGIC PLAN**

**2010 – 2013**

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**Adopted by  
The East Orange Public Library  
The Board of Trustees  
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**INTRODUCTION**

The East Orange Public Library (EOPL) has reinvented itself over the past ten years. Among the Library's achievements:

- **Technology.** The Library has embraced technology. Computer classes and access to the Internet are two primary reasons community members now come to the Library. EOPL was the first New Jersey public Library on the Ethernet, and has remained at the cutting edge of technology applications in libraries, including expanded bandwidth capability and self-checkout. Gaming, Wii, and electronic databases are all part of services used by children, teens and adults. The website offers patrons remote access to Library resources, allows people to reserve materials, make donations and pay fines online, and promotes upcoming events.
- **Collection Development.** EOPL staff take pride in keeping up with the interests and trends of their community, and responding with materials that people want to read. They were one of the first libraries to have an urban fiction collection, started before these materials were readily available through traditional channels. Graphic novels and materials about the African-American experience are other examples of the staff's commitment to bringing the community relevant, interesting material that is responsive to their lives and their interests. Materials and information are available via hard and soft cover books, graphic novels, videos/DVDs, and audio and downloadable books.
- **Community Center.** The Library is one of the few gathering places available in East Orange. To fulfill its role as a community center the Library offers programming that bring people together. Monthly programming, including dances, games, craft groups, movies, live performances and other cultural events, has increased significantly for children, adults and teens. The East Orange Room is one of the few meeting spaces in town, and is often used by community groups.
- **Excellent Staff.** The Library profession has changed dramatically over the past ten or so years. With the predominance of web-based sources of information, librarians are shifting from the source of information to the guides on how to find that information. Budget reductions have meant reduced staff available to cover expanding services. Changes in the community's demographics have also required Library staff to learn new skills. In response to these challenges staff have learned to use and trouble shoot basic technology functions, and have been cross trained, allowing the Library to stretch its limited resources while ensuring excellent service at the Main Library and the branches.

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- **Building Improvements.** The first floor at the Main Library has been redesigned to create special areas for teens and adults. The children’s area, which was only open after school, is now available at all times. A designated café area allows people to enjoy food while at the Library. Fundamental structural needs have also been attended to, including a new roof and HVAC system at the Main Library and new furnaces at each branch. The physical environment at the branches has also been upgraded.
  
- **Supplementary Resources.** The Library has supplemented the core funding provided by the City of East Orange with government and private grants, fees from sales of books and supplies, and individual donations. The Friends of the Library have grown, and have stepped up their fundraising efforts. Their annual events generate the revenues needed to sponsor critical Library activities such as the summer reading program. Their members are also staunch advocates on behalf of the Library.

In this context, the Board of Trustees of East Orange Public Library committed in June, 2009 to undertake a strategic planning process to ensure that the Library continues to provide exemplary services to the full spectrum of the East Orange community in the years ahead.

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**METHODOLOGY AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

As a public institution, Library leadership felt that it was important to involve a range of constituents in developing strategic priorities. To this end, the planning process included:

- Surveys of current patrons at the main Library and the branches.
- Evaluations of computer classes at the Library.
- Staff interviews of specific constituents, including teachers, home schoolers, and speakers of other languages.
- Research into demographic trends affecting East Orange and New Jersey.
- A focus group with the Friends of the Library.

Staff also interviewed partners in city government, including:

- Robert L. Bowser, Mayor
- Ernest Freeman, Director, Policy, Planning and Development
- Reginald Lewis, City Administrator
- M.J. Peterson, Manager, Division of Employment and Training
- Quilla Talmadge, City Council President
- Rochelle D. Williams-Evans, Health Officer, Health and Human Services

Board and staff members gave generously of their time as well. The full staff spent a day discussing strategic priorities at a staff development retreat. Senior managers met regularly with planning consultant Barbara S. Miller to shape the strategy and goals. Particular thanks are due to:

- Carolyn Ryan Reed, Director
- Pamela Holmes, Assistant Library Director
- Lina A. Belkewitch, Coordinator, Public Relations and Community Outreach
- Nathalia Bermudez, Coordinator , Adult Services
- Christal Blue, Coordinator, Youth Services
- Ivonne Kratz , Senior Librarian; Coordinator, Collection Development
- Renee Marken, Assistant Chief of Administrative Services
- Jenny Tong, Supervising Librarian, Technology and Technical Services
- J. Robin Starkey, Principal Librarian; Coordinator, Reference Services
- Nancy Tinney, Reference Librarian; Coordinator, Branch Services
- Joyce West, Reference Librarian; Coordinator, Customer Support Services

Board members had numerous discussions of strategic priorities at board meetings and a board/staff retreat. The plan was adopted at the June board meeting, 2010. Our thanks to:

- Jean E. Maurice, Board President
- Gloria L. Holt, Vice-President
- Jimmy Small, Treasurer
- Elaine Evans, Superintendent's Designee
- William McNeely, Mayor's Designee
- Andrea McPhatter, Council Liaison
- Mumtaz Bari-Brown
- Christine Carter Davis
- Karen Pierce
- Tracie L. Saxton

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**MISSION, VALUES AND ROLES**

- **Mission Statement:** The East Orange Public Library helps people of all ages meet their informational, educational, and recreational needs by acquiring, organizing, and assisting in the use of print and non-print resources.
  
- **Values**

A number of core values inform the Library's priorities. These include:

  - **The Library is for everyone.** Patrons' interests are not judged. The Library's job is to provide the community with the information and resources that interest them and attract them to use the Library. Once people come to the Library they may discover new areas of interest.
  
  - **Empowerment.** The Library offers resources, and staff train people to use those resources so they have the freedom to rely on themselves and to explore their own interests independently.
  
  - **The Library belongs to patrons.** Their feedback matters. Staff pride themselves in being responsive to patron needs and interests, and will go the extra step to anticipate emerging interests based on social, economic, technological and other trends.
  
  - **High quality services and operations.** To ensure that patrons receive the best possible service the Library supports ongoing professional development for staff, and empowers the staff to make decisions in their areas of responsibility.
  
- **Roles.** The Library is an integral, central part of the East Orange community. Residents rely on the Library to serve as:
  - **A place to learn and grow.** The Library is a source of intellectual stimulation and a gateway to discovery. At the Library people are exposed to new ideas and experiences that open new horizons for them. Learning encompasses classes, tutoring, self-education, computer/Internet access, arts and crafts, research materials and assistance.
  
  - **A community center and safe haven.** Patrons who come to the Library come for many reasons. For some, the Library is a sanctuary, an oasis. At the Library, people in the community see their community reflected back to them. For newcomers the Library is often their first portal into the community. People come together at the Library to share hobbies and for entertainment and culture. The space is a magnet, offering young and old a place to come together to learn and socialize.
  
  - **An "equalizer."** The Library provides access to resources that other communities may take for granted. Services related to employment – tools for resume writing, assistance with job search and filing for benefits, and special self-help programs such as health fairs, tax preparation and expungement, contribute to the economic empowerment of the community.

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**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT GOALS**

As part of the Library's continuing commitment to serve as an integral part of the East Orange community, in alignment with the city of East Orange's current and future plans, the following community priorities were identified by key stakeholders, board and staff.

**Community Goal #1. Ensure that young people in East Orange are able to succeed.**

The Library, in partnership with parents and the schools, has an essential role to play in the development of young people in East Orange, and services to young people continue to be a priority for the Library. The Library has the following goals in relation to young people:

- A. Contribute to basic literacy skills for children and teens.
  - 1. Collect materials, including books and DVD's, geared to basic literacy.
  - 2. Continue to offer homework help.
  - 3. Encourage children to read by collecting popular books that they will want to read.
  - 4. Reward reading by giving awards and access to desirable technology.
  
- B. Help young people develop the skills they require for lifelong learning and success.
  - 1. Treat children and teens with interest and respect, and create a safe haven in which they can learn and explore.
  - 2. Create opportunities that help teens develop leadership skills.
  - 3. Maintain and develop Library policies that support socializing and collaboration among teens in an appropriate manner that prepares them for expectations later in life.
  - 4. Explore life skills training in areas such as financial literacy, interviewing skills, or how to dress for success.
  
- C. Help parents help their children learn and succeed.
  - 1. Support home-schoolers with textbooks, materials, lessons, and access to educational websites as well as audio-video materials to the extent that resources allow.
  - 2. Offer workshops to parents to help them use technology and materials to support their children's learning.
  
- D. Strengthen the partnership between the Library and teachers, to supplement and support the work of teachers in the classroom.
  - 1. Work with the Board of Education to reach out to teachers and identify the best ways for the Library to partner with them.
  
- E. Continue to invest in technology and other services that attract and benefit young learners.
  - 1. Use social networking media to reach out to young people.
  - 2. Expand gaming activities, if feasible, to contribute to teenage literacy.

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**Community Goal #2. Support the economic development of East Orange and its residents.**

According to the most recent census data, one in four East Orange residents live in poverty, as do just under one in three children. Twenty percent of older adults are impoverished. The Library is committed to continue their support of residents who are seeking greater economic opportunities in the following ways:

- A. Access to information and services related to job search.
  - 1. Provide computer access, resume review and job coaching at the Library.
  - 2. Partner with the East Orange Division of Employment and Training and other labor and work force agencies to meet the needs of job seekers.
  - 3. Explore additional programs, such as a resume fair or a job fair, to help residents who are job seeking.
- B. Support adults in continuing education programs at local colleges.
- C. Partner with the Mayor and other City Leaders to support the city's economic initiatives.

**Community Goal #3: Increase support to underserved communities.**

The Library provides services to many groups with special needs. Examples include delivering materials to homebound individuals, large print and audio books for visually impaired patrons, and limited materials in other languages. The Library is known for its support of job-seekers, helping them with resume development and using the Internet in job search and applications.

In the coming years the Library has identified the following underserved communities as priorities for service enhancements:

- **Older adults.** These individuals are considered a vulnerable and underserved segment of the East Orange population. Nearly one in five adults over the age of sixty five live in poverty. Some elderly residents are not able to manage the skills required to access benefits as the application process migrates online.
- **Immigrants.** While the majority of East Orange residents are African American, nearly one in four are immigrants. Twenty percent of residents speak a language other than English in the home. For speakers of other languages classes in English as a Second Language (ESL) and classes and materials in languages other than English are particularly helpful.
- **Individuals suffering economic distress.** 25% of East Orange residents live below the poverty level, including 37% of the community's children. These statistics pre-date the recession of 2008, indicating that unemployment and poverty are likely even higher today.

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- **Low literacy.** The economic downturn has been especially hard on individuals who lack of basic literacy skills. People who, in the past, have been able to work without being able to read or write are now required to present resumes for new jobs. Applying for benefits, housing and other basic necessities are often beyond the abilities of these individuals.

As conditions change so does the definition of an “underserved community.” The Library is committed to responding to changing demographic and economic trends in the City.

**Increased support to underserved communities** – initial priorities:

- A. Increase services available to older adults, including home bound elderly.
  - 1. Partner with the East Orange Division of Senior Services to reach and serve more older adults.
  - 2. Explore opportunities to bring services to seniors at the new facility being developed for seniors in East Orange.
  - 3. Continue basic computer skills classes specifically for seniors.
- B. Increase materials available in other languages, based on the composition of the community.
- C. Support skill development in language and literacy to the extent that funding is available.
  - 1. If funding is available, re-institute ESL classes.
  - 2. If funding is available, re-institute basic literacy classes.
- D. Provide access to information and support for residents applying for benefits, within limits that protect the Library from liability.
- E. Partner with other organizations, agencies and volunteers to make services at the Library available for homeless and other individuals whose needs exceed the expertise and time of Library staff.

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**LIBRARY GOALS**

- I. Maintain robust services at the Main Library in response to the diversity of needs in our community.** In the face of declining City, State and Federal revenues the Library's first priority is to maintain a high level of core services at its flagship, the main Library.

In support of its community development goals, the Library has the following internal priorities:

- A. Technology.** Ensure that the East Orange community has access to up-to-date technology that supports their information and connectivity needs and interests.

Technology has become a central aspect of the Library's services. Community members of all ages and backgrounds are drawn to the computers and computer classes that offer them a window to information, friends and family, services, entertainment and other resources. Because some members of the community are not familiar with technology, Library staff has to work with each patron at their individual level of competency.

1. Keep up with emerging trends in technology.
  - a. Continue the shift from book-based to online reference.
  - b. Increase access to digitized materials and information on mobile devices.
  - c. Facilitate check out through the use of self check-out and handheld devices.
  - d. Maintain and enhance wireless access.
2. Increase access to Library services and materials online.

- B. Facilities.** Ensure that East Orange Public Library's facilities are safe, comfortable and maximize the use of space for patrons.

The following goals and objectives will only be feasible with additional capital funding.

1. Enhance Library facilities within the current overall configuration.
  - a. Upgrade public restrooms.
  - b. Enhance the children's area to incorporate multi-purpose usage.
  - c. Introduce more, smaller meeting spaces.
  - d. Introduce areas where families and groups can work together.
2. Perform major capital renovations to allow for:
  - a. A meeting space with a separate entrance that can be used by the community outside of Library hours.
  - b. Children and teens to each have their own, glass-enclosed space on the first floor.
  - c. A central, welcoming area when people enter the building.
  - d. New public restrooms.

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**C. Increase resources available to the Library on behalf of patrons.**

1. Expand earned income opportunities that provide patrons with more of the resources they require, including:
  - a. Sale of supplies.
  - b. Year-round book sales.
  - c. Sale of exam prep and other materials.
  - d. E-commerce via the website.
2. Continue to expand contributed revenue opportunities.
  - a. Increase giving from individuals through:
    - i. Friends' special events.
    - ii. Grassroots and social networking fundraising.
    - iii. Use of the website.
  - b. Grants from corporations, foundations and local businesses.

**D. Increase community awareness and usage of the Library's many services.**

1. Regularly market and promote the Library's services, programs, events, and products through:
  - a. A unified monthly calendar, available online and in hard copy.
  - b. A quarterly newsletter.
  - c. Flyers related to specific events.
  - d. Press releases.
  - e. Website and social networking media.
2. Reach out to the community through:
  - a. Partnerships with schools, community organizations and government agencies to distribute information about Library services.
  - b. A presence at community events.
  - c. Increased coverage by local media.
3. Increase signage that leads people to the Library.
4. Maintain a high level of customer satisfaction, as measured by:
  - a. Customer surveys
  - b. Program attendance
  - c. Electronic visits
  - d. Circulation data

**II. Explore alternatives for reaching people who have difficulty accessing the Main Library facility. Possibilities to explore include:**

- A. Branches: Continue limited hours of service as needed and feasible.
- B. Partnerships and Community Outreach
  1. House small collections with partner institutions, such as schools and churches.
  2. Share facilities, and related expenses, with appropriate governmental and community-based agencies.
  3. Sponsor periodic activities in the community.
- C. Increase remote access to information and services through technology.
- D. Explore transportation from outlying neighborhoods to the Main Library during after school hours.