



DARE TO DREAM: VISIONING YOUR LIBRARY

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I invite you and your community to go on a journey and experiment with what can be done to your library space if you all dare to dream.

My name is Susan Green and I am the director/librarian in a rural library in Vermont with 1,500 people. My library is located in a building, The Old Schoolhouse Common, which also houses the Town Clerk's office, a meeting room for the Town Select board and other town committees and commissions, the Onion River Food Shelf, and area organizations and businesses. When I first came to the library as director, I saw right away the library needed more space and other changes to the environment. I spent a year working, watching patrons trip on the very old wrinkled rug, older youth looking for a place to call their own, and closets overflowing with unused items. I felt helpless to change anything because it seemed like the budget was set in stone. The librarian before had already done a campaign to add on another room for programming. It didn't look like the community was ready to change anything. It took me a while to dare to dream up what I thought would make the library a better space and a few years to make the dream come true. I made this tool to help other librarians dare to dream.

What is in this tool?

- Look at your library through a new lens
- Write an aspiration for your library space
- Plan a project which enhances the library space

IN THEIR WORDS

"She just by changing things right it just it feels fresh and new and vibrant and and it's a it's a it's a comfortable place. It's always been nice to comfortable place to come to but it's like she's created a new place."

--"James", interview #5-2-04

VISIONING THE LIBRARY

Sometimes we are afraid to look at what our library needs because it may cost too much or there may not be the resources and people to support making the change. We may be too tired from the day-to-day running of our library to imagine taking on another project. Let us try to put all of the barriers aside and make believe the “sky’s the limit.” Let’s try not to censor our thoughts and ideas. We may have to pare down some of them and put them on a to-do list for the far future, but this work is important.

These exercises can be done alone or with a group (eg. Friends of the Library, Board of Trustees, focus group, or staff.) You can have each person do the exercise separately or in a small groups and report back to the whole group. Write the ideas on a big piece of paper for everyone to see and then have people put stars next to the ideas they support.

Vision your Aspirations: Dare to Dream!

Find a place where you can really relax. It can be in your home, on a special walking trail, your garden, the library when you are alone, your bedroom, anywhere you can let your mind wander freely. Close your eyes and breathe deeply and comfortably until you begin to relax. Now when you feel calm and ready to let go of every distraction around you, picture your library as it is right now. Look at every detail of it, where the shelves are, your desk, the entrance to the library, let yourself visualize every nook and cranny, inside and out. Make a mental note of which part of the visualization gives you a sense of well being and when something doesn’t feel right. Keep visualizing different parts of your library. You can also do the scan with your eyes open, right in the library if the other way feels uncomfortable. You can wander around the library and take actual notes about what feels like it is working and what doesn’t. The purpose to this exercise is to allow ideas to percolate. Try to let go of the intellectual mind and allow the intuitive mind to take over and dream up new ways to perceive the space. When you are done doing the scan of the library, write down what spaces gave you a sense of wellbeing and what spaces made you uncomfortable.

In other words, what you “dream” you would like it to be.

Assess Your Needs: Now that you (or you and your group) have finished the visioning exercise, answer the following questions.

What do you find appealing about your library right now that you would not ever change?

What is “just not quite right”?

Do you feel comfortable in the space? Is it working for library staff and volunteers? Patrons? If not, what do you need to make it more comfortable?

Does your library have enough room for inside programs for both large and small groups? If no, how does the space need to change? Do you need to reconfigure what you have? Do you need to add on? Are there program places in town outside of the library?

Does your library have adequate space for outside programs? If yes, move on to the next question. If not, what can be done to create outside space?

Are your computers and internet services adequate? If not, what needs to be changed?

Does your library have enough room for books and materials? Do people seem satisfied with their experience browsing for books and materials?



Plan for the future					
Name a distinct project to make your vision real	Which needs does this project meet?	Who can help?	Steps to take?	Time-line?*	

* Is this a 1 year, 5 year, 10 year, or seed planting (one which will bear fruit after you've moved on) project?

Try to limit yourself to one project per table and make however many copies you'd like!

MY APPROACH TO REALIZING MY LIBRARY VISION

Storage limitations:

When I first did this scan at the library where I work, I found what made me the most uncomfortable was the lack of storage. There was a file cabinet taking up most of the space in the only closet and 20 metal chairs we hardly ever used were against the wall in the room we used for library programs. Things we weren't using every day were stacked unattractively on shelves instead of stored in the closet. I wasn't sure what I could do with all this "stuff" but I knew something had to change. I went to the Board of Trustees for their help and together we came up with a plan and we worked with the Town officers of Marshfield who also used the building. They let us move the chairs and the file cabinet to their meeting rooms and we built a closet where the metal chairs used to be. Now we had two closets for storage. We moved the clutter into the closets and now we had more room to expand our collection.

Programming space:

My library in Marshfield, VT had one room for programming. We started a playgroup for children ages birth to age 5. We also started rotating art shows 6 times a year with Art and Author nights for the art openings. Both offerings became so popular we were overflowing our legal capacity. My dream was to increase the programming space. There was a rented space right next to our program room. I kept my eye on the space, waiting for the day it would become vacant, never giving up on my "dream". Eventually it was empty but how would I afford it? I needed to move on the space right away. I worked with the Jaquith Public Library Board of Trustees and the Marshfield Historical Society which was located in a small dusty old room downstairs. We worked out a plan to create a Marshfield History Museum space that would be part of the library, open to the public when the library was open. It could be used for library programming as well as by the Historical Society. We would share the room and share the rent. We went to the Town of Marshfield citizens with our idea and received the funding. So my dream came true!

Further Resources:

Want to learn more about making the library a place where everyone feels welcome and comfortable? See "Is Everyone Welcome at Your Library" and "The Library as the Community's Welcome Center".