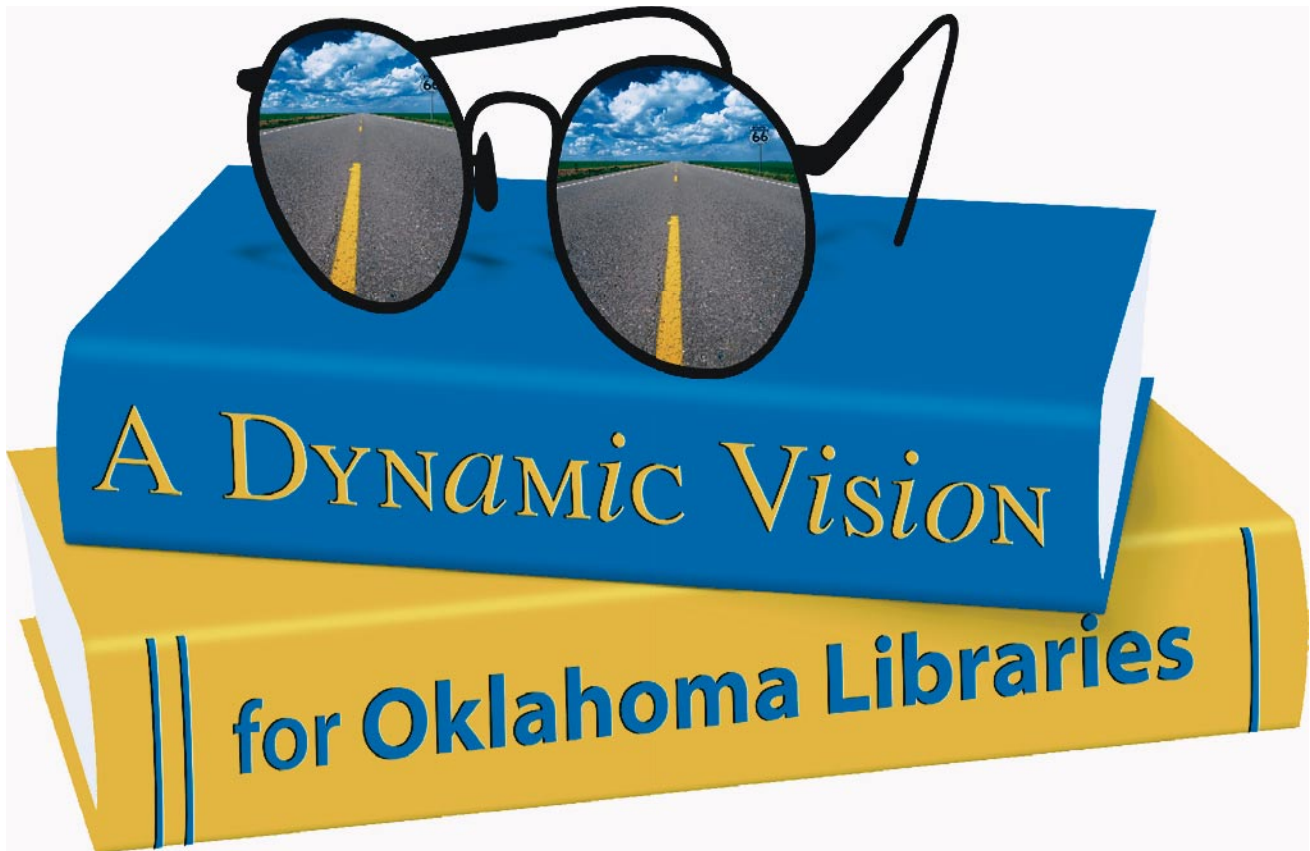


A New Road



By 2010, the news for Oklahoma is good and gratifying.

An ever-increasing number of Oklahoma children enter school ready to read and learn. More and more of the state's students graduate from high school and college, and residents' incomes are on the upswing. Even that elusive something—call it sense of community or quality of life—has reached new heights in small towns and big city neighborhoods across the state.

Of course, many people and organizations helped to make these gains possible in recent years. But few played as important a part as did public library leaders, workers, volunteers, and users.

The choices library activists made nearly a decade ago are now paying big dividends for people and libraries. At that time, advocates spelled out their vision in big, bold terms and described what investments in libraries would buy and mean. Today in 2010, not only are Oklahomans better off, but the state places in the top ten nationally in total library support. Even rural libraries enjoy substantial backing from a variety of sources.

Because of a vision of public libraries:

- **As dynamic as technology**
- **As family friendly as a Sunday in the park**
- **As enduring as the timeless world of books and knowledge**
- **As hot as tomorrow's trends**
- **And only a click away**

These community institutions are on the leading edge of learning and service for Oklahomans, especially children.

Public libraries have the funding, staff, and support to provide excellent services to individuals and to help address issues of critical concern to Oklahoma. With strong statewide constituencies and the power that comes from working together, public libraries are truly institutions for the 21st century.

A
DYNAMIC
VISION

GOOD REASONS FOR A NEW ROAD

Far from being made obsolete by information technology, public libraries today are more vital than ever before for some very good reasons.

- Recent public opinion surveys show public libraries to be among the **most trusted institutions** in places large and small, rich and poor.
- Few other institutions can **help as much as public libraries can with school readiness**, literacy, and early childhood development.
- Except for schools, public libraries are **the most common public institution associated with learning**. Almost every community already has one.
- Public libraries **“level the playing field”** for achievement. People say they use public libraries **first and foremost for education**.
- Unique institutions, public libraries offer **a myriad of electronic and print resources**, along with **personalized assistance** in using them.
- **Computers and technology** are available and free for everyone at public libraries.
- Public libraries **complement the efforts of many other organizations** in Oklahoma. The Governor’s Task Force on Early Childhood Education looks to libraries to help parents raise children who read. Oklahoma Futures, the state’s economic development arm, wants to promote lifelong learning. Brain Gain 2010, the State Regents for Higher Education’s plan for increasing college graduation rates, seeks to strengthen support for students.



THE LIBRARY as a
TOWN’S “SPARK PLUG”

I want to tell you how important Warner Public Library has been for our community. I was on the Town Council when the idea for this library began in 1989. The library has been the spark plug for the renewal of the city of Warner. Since the library was constructed, renovation was done to the Warner Community Center and Warner Town Hall, also the construction of a new fire station and a police station. These projects were followed by private investment in our community, with the expansion of a new post office and Cross Telephone offices. All of the building activity circles around the library, which is the center of the wheel.

—Troy Duncan
Former Mayor, Warner, Oklahoma

The reasons Oklahomans value public libraries are also why we must ensure their continual improvement. Oklahoma has many great libraries, but progress and change are necessary if *all* public libraries are to be able to do what is possible for their communities and the state.

A DYNAMIC AND REALISTIC VISION

This dynamic vision for public libraries and Oklahoma in 2010 is realistic and achievable. *A New Road* describes the effort initiated by the Oklahoma Public Library Directors Council and the Oklahoma Department of Libraries to lead library development in the coming years.

COMPONENTS OF A NEW ROAD

1. Models of Quality Library Service to Inspire and Guide
2. Nurturing the Next Readers
3. Advocating for Investments to Fuel the “Engines of Change”
4. Making This Vision Happen With Your Help

Models to Inspire and Guide

In the past, many leaders and advocates have asked for help in defining “quality” library services for communities of various sizes. In response, the Public Library Directors Council and Oklahoma Department of Libraries recently published *Choosing a Dynamic Future: Models of Public Library Service for Oklahoma*, the first planning and advocacy tool of its kind.

The **voluntary** models and guidelines:

- **Show** communities without libraries how to develop quality services
- **Define** quality levels for communities with libraries already
- **Describe** what is necessary to pay for quality

Choosing a Dynamic Future: Models of Public Library Service for Oklahoma defines three types of libraries and provides guidelines in the areas of Access, Services, People, and Issues with enough detail to support change, but not so much as to quash a community’s creativity. The three types of libraries are Gateway, Pacesetter, and Innovator. A community of any size can choose to achieve the Gateway, Pacesetter, or Innovator levels.

- **Gateway—A means of entry or access**

Public libraries often have been called gateways to knowledge and discovery. This concept also can be applied to libraries themselves. Those that embrace this essential level have chosen to start down a path of discovery and progress.

- **Pacesetter—An institution that leads the way**

This category refers to those communities that have elected to extend their development beyond the Gateway. The Pacesetter libraries have the many resources needed to offer greater information sources and more diversified services in their communities.

- **Innovator—An organization on the cutting edge, operating as much for the future as for the present**

These libraries stand out in every way. They provide exemplary services and anticipate their communities' needs. Innovator libraries represent the "best" in Oklahoma.

- **Steps Beyond—An opportunity to define the next level**

For libraries that have reached the Innovator stage, Steps Beyond allows communities and library systems to determine the next level of development for themselves.

The models combine traditional quality measures with indicators of how residents experience library services. Since the models are separate from any state requirements, communities will decide for themselves whether, and how, to use them to increasingly improve their services. See www.odl.state.ok.us/vision for the complete publication.



Reading Time Creates Family Time

A mom and her son settle in to read a story. Both of them think, "This is my favorite time of the day." She thought her son would get everything he needed to read well in school. But a TV ad made her see that she could do more to help him. On their first trip to the library, they found the best books and people who talked about reading in ways she could relate to. Now, reading is something they both enjoy.



The Place to See and Be Seen

Books, computers, CDs . . . a coffee shop, this library is the place to see and be seen. Partnerships have made a world-class art gallery possible, along with classes and discussions on topics from A-Z. You can feel the energy. It's truly a center for the mind and for everyone. Heads up—here comes the next big idea!



Electronic Excellence by the Hour

This library does more than talk about serving customers 24/7. At home or at work or via PDA, it delivers complete articles, the latest statistics, and online answers anytime. The library has even helped to attract new firms with the high-paying jobs that college graduates used to go elsewhere to find. Here is truly electronic excellence.

Nurturing the Next Readers: A Public Library Initiative for Oklahoma

In recent years, scientists have reconfirmed the importance of quality early childhood care and education. Over the next five years especially, Oklahoma's public libraries will increase their already substantial commitment to young children and literacy. They will do so by training staff members, taking services to childcare centers and other community locations, expanding children's collections, developing new partnerships, and engaging in many other activities. What makes "Nurturing the Next Readers" particularly noteworthy is that libraries are bringing their unique expertise to an issue of vital importance to Oklahoma.



A LIBRARY VOLUNTEER WORKS WITH TOMORROW'S READERS

A toddler sits expectantly as a familiar visitor begins to read aloud. After the story, the visitor explains to the childcare staff how to introduce parents to the new "Family Reading" program and adult literacy classes. Saying goodbye until next week, this committed, yet unpaid, library worker knows that he is working wonders with reading.



DISTANT, BUT STILL CLOSE AT HAND

A high school junior starts gathering statistics for her most important project. When she gets stuck, a librarian helps her understand the numbers and then to set up an online "conversation" with a prominent scientist. This town of 1000 is a long way from anywhere, but at the library it doesn't seem that way.



A PLACE WHERE EVERYONE IS HEARD

If the letters to the editor are any indication, tonight's public meeting will be a hot one. The standing-room-only crowd talked with leaders for several hours before a compromise was found. On the way out, a neighborhood activist stopped to tell the library manager she was glad that the library "is open to any group. Everyone gets heard."



IDEAS, BOOKS, AND PEOPLE

The award-winning author held everyone spellbound with his stories. He says he learns something new from every audience. In turn, his celebrity status brings people to the library who might not have thought it had anything to offer to them. Guess that's what win-win really means.

Investments to Fuel the “Engines of Change”

Historian Barbara Tuchman described books as “engines of change.” At the community level, that description fits public libraries also. To keep this unique “motor” running at peak performance, library leaders and policy makers need a variety of funding tools and options.

Some public libraries have countless choices for developing resources, but restrictions hamstringing institutions in other communities. The vision for 2010 can only be achieved with greater flexibility and more options for funds. The Public Library Directors Council and the Oklahoma Department of Libraries will promote the following tools to help make Vision 2010 a reality.

- Funding flexibility (meaning lifting millage “caps” and developing new financing tools)
- Bonding authority
- Funding diversification
- Economies of scale and outsourcing
- Increasing state aid for libraries through existing vehicles and new sources
- Library foundations and programs of individual gifts and bequests
- Friends of the Library financial support
- Retail operations and other entrepreneurial activities
- Grantwriting
- In-kind donations
- Matching and leveraging dollars
- Partnerships



A REASON TO INVEST

This community of 5,000 is working to achieve all of the guidelines for a “Gateway” library this year. It has taken time, but the ideas and the help in the *Models of Library Service* have made the library the most popular cause in town and brought more resources of all kinds. Just think what could happen now.



A PARTNERSHIP MEANS SO MUCH

After settling into his volunteer practice, a “retired” physician contacted the children’s librarian to see how the clinic could promote books and reading among parents and children who use the clinic. The librarian jumped at the chance to help more families read together and show that the library can help almost anywhere in the community.



COMING TOGETHER TO THRIVE

People treasure their rural lifestyle. The town wants to maintain, and even improve, its library but times are so tough. A solution finally came from another town in similar straits. By combining their efforts, each library got more than it would have had on its own. Banding together has breathed new life into a town that thought it didn’t have any choices.

Join Us on A New Road

Public library leaders and advocates are committed to improving library services, and expanding resources. However, many more supporters will be needed to get us to the end of this new road. Your assistance in publicizing public libraries' needs and the Vision 2010 would be appreciated.

Please contact Susan McVey, Director, Oklahoma Department of Libraries for more information on *A New Road* or to discuss how your organization could work with public libraries.

In addition, your personal endorsement of public library development can be recorded at www.odl.state.ok.us/vision. Or, complete the form here and send it to us.

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• Yes, I enthusiastically support **A Dynamic Vision for Oklahoma Public Libraries.**

• Please list my name on the **Oklahoma Public Library Honor Roll.**

• Name _____

• Affiliation _____

• E-mail address _____

• Is there anyone else we should talk to about *A New Road*?


• Contact Information

• Thank you!

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 *A Career of Value*

Librarians haven't always enjoyed such stature in the community. But today they are every bit as prominent, and valued, as the software designers at the state's high-tech firms. The original "information experts" are leaders in a Knowledge Workforce.

Oklahomans Value Public Libraries and Want to Continue Funding Library Services

In a recent statewide, random sample telephone survey, Oklahomans were nearly unanimous in their positive feelings about public libraries and their willingness to spend tax dollars on library services, materials, and buildings.

- More than 95% said that support of libraries is a good use of their tax dollars.
- More than 9 out of 10 responded that public libraries are important for literacy programs for adults and children, activities for teens, and programs for adults in addition to help with studying and leisure reading.
- Using library computers is important to the community according to 90% of all respondents—urban and rural.
- Public libraries deserve continued state funding for electronic and print materials, computers, new buildings, and literacy programs according to more than two thirds of Oklahomans.
- Nearly 90% thought that, in the future, communities would need libraries as much or more then they do now.

Source: Oklahoma Library Survey,
University of Oklahoma, 2002

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Oklahoma Public Library Directors Council

May 2003

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Duncan Public Library

Kay Boies, Executive Director
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Catharine Cook, Director
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The **Oklahoma Department of Libraries** is the state agency charged with serving public libraries, promoting library development, and administering the Oklahoma state archives.

The **Public Library Directors Council** is a voluntary association of the chief executives of public libraries throughout the state. The chairmanship rotates from year to year. The organization provides a forum for solving problems, sharing information, and developing partnerships.

**Oklahoma
Department
of
Libraries**

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