

Models of **Public Library Service** for **Oklahoma**

Oklahoma
Department
Libraries

Public Library
Directors Council

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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.


This vision of public libraries and their powerful results for communities and the state is realistic and possible with clear plans and focused resources. *Choices for a Dynamic Future* provides the guidance you—our elected officials, library professionals, and volunteers—have asked for as you work to bring your community the best possible services and programs.

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 following pages provide many ideas and options for the future. The stories marked with  illustrate the possibilities.

Inspire and Guide: Oklahoma's Approach to Library Development

The reasons Oklahomans value public libraries are also why we must ensure their continual improvement. In 2001, the Oklahoma Public Library Directors Council and the Oklahoma Department of Libraries began to work together to make the Vision 2010 a reality. Oklahoma has many great public libraries, but we realized that even more progress is necessary if all public libraries are going to be able to do what is possible for communities and the state. The first product of our collaborative effort is this planning and advocacy tool: *Models of Public Library Service for Oklahoma*.

The models fulfill a variety of purposes. They:

- 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

In the absence of national guidelines, these **voluntary** models respond to your and others' requests for help in communicating what "quality" library service is and what it entails for communities of different sizes. *Models of Public Library Service for Oklahoma* defines three types of libraries and specific aspects of **Access, Services, People, and Issues**. With enough detail to support change and improvement—but not so much as to quash a community's creativity—the models are intended both to inspire and guide. In short, we hope the models present a road map to a dynamic future for Oklahoma's public libraries.

Choices in an Incremental Process

We developed these indicators and guidelines with the public's point of view in mind. As a result, you will see a combination of standard library measures and others that reflect how residents experience library services. The numbers attached to the indicators came from research on the status of Oklahoma's public libraries as well as from national comparisons.

Since the models are completely separate from requirements for "state aid" from the Oklahoma Department of Libraries, communities will decide for themselves whether, and how, to use the guidelines. For those communities that participate, progress is expected to be an incremental process. As the description of 2010 indicates, change will come bit by bit. The models include short- and long-term steps toward excellence. Many libraries have achieved some of the steps already. Others will represent a "reach." Some communities and libraries will move rapidly, and others may need substantial assistance.

Public library operations vary substantially across Oklahoma and may differ even within a city or a region served by one library system. In a metropolitan area, different branches focus on particular purposes, while library systems serve numerous communities. The models are intended to apply across metro

areas and systems, rather than individually to all branches or locations within a system. In particular, large metropolitan libraries and regional library systems may choose to emphasize different components of the models in various parts of their service areas. We want library leaders and policy makers to have the flexibility to pursue the best plans for specific locations **and** across a library system.

The Oklahoma Department of Libraries and the Public Library Directors Council together will monitor and update the *Models of Public Library Service for Oklahoma* as needed. In addition, we will develop a range of options for technical assistance. Thus in the next few years, Oklahoma's public libraries will become even more capable of delivering high quality, innovative services in their communities.

Defining Three Types of Libraries: From Gateway to Innovator and Beyond

We call the three types of libraries Gateway, Pacesetter, and Innovator.

- **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.

For the Vision 2010 to become a reality, libraries all across Oklahoma will need to participate. In the following pages, the Gateway, Pacesetter, and Innovator levels are described for communities in each of six population categories. In addition, vignettes illustrate the possibilities the models present. We look forward to working with you on this journey to *A Dynamic Future*.