

A VISION FOR IDAHO LIBRARIES IN 2020

Idaho libraries are the nexus of global information, innovative services and community, enabling us to sustain our history, empower our present, and create our future.

THE "2020 VISION" FUTURES PROCESS

Beginning in late 2004, a Long Range Planning Steering Committee of sixteen representatives of Idaho libraries and the State library worked to design a creative and inclusive process for establishing a new long range future vision for Idaho libraries. Reviewing the process and results from a similar project in 1998, the task force proposed setting a vision for 2020, and expressed a desire to push the boundaries of thought regarding library futures as far as possible.

In August of 2005, the Idaho Library community gathered in a unique "Think Tank" to consider the future of Idaho libraries. Representatives of Idaho libraries met over three days to propose a future vision. Working with several science fiction writers, experts on future trends and libraries, and facilitated by planning expert and futurist Glen Hiemstra, the Think Tank participants explored long-range trends, discussed alternate future scenarios for Idaho libraries, and proposed ideas for a long-range vision.

After the Think Tank, more than a hundred Idahoans gathered in a series of seven regional Futures meetings to learn the results of the Think Tank and to view a DVD summarizing the Think Tank program. Participants in the regional meetings provided recommendations on future trends to consider, ideas for improving the vision themes, and suggestions on how the vision might be implemented. Finally, an expanded Steering Committee met to refine the vision and develop proposed strategies based on all of the input that had been received. The following summarizes the outcomes of this work.

A vision is a description of the preferred future. It captures the best elements of your past and present that you wish to continue, and the most attractive elements of the future that your heart desires. The best visions change as you move toward them.

- Glen Hiemstra

If we could spend just a fraction of the time and money we spend on trying to predict the future instead on imagining preferred future options together, we'd be living in a different world.

- Edward Lindaman

The biggest single threat to what libraries are to become is indifference. If people don't care, if they don't come, if they don't pay attention to us, if they don't support us, if they don't think what we do is important, then it's over.

- Joe Janes

WHAT THE FUTURES PROCESS DOES AND DOES NOT DO

There is a contrast between strategic thinking, strategic decision making and strategic planning. This project has been an exercise in the former two activities, which uses a process that can also be called futuring. To think strategically is to explore probable and possible futures with a creative and open mind. Participants in this project attempted to understand what is knowable about the future and to imagine possibilities. They narrowed this exploration toward the preferred future, and made a strategic decision on a new vision for Idaho libraries in 2020.

Strategic planning, in contrast, is a process of developing ideas and methods for implementing strategic decisions. In suggesting possible strategies that could move Idaho libraries toward the vision, the project began the transition toward strategic planning. Yet the futures process was not designed to develop a full strategic plan, and this report will not present such a plan. In 2006 the State Library will develop its strategic plan to extend the work of the 2020 Vision process. At the same time, libraries around the state will be encouraged to develop their own plans for moving toward the vision.

DRIVING FORCES

- **Generational shifts in communities and library customers.**
The most important feature of population change for the future of libraries is a profound generational change that is under way. Most people are familiar with the aging population, though perhaps not with how dramatic this aging will be in the next twenty years. Today Idaho has a very young age profile, with only about 11 percent of the population over 65 but in the early 2020s this percentage will increase to over 20 percent. At the same time, there is a new generation on the scene; young people born since 1980, the “digital native” generation. Growing up with computers, and more recently with the Internet, this generation views and uses libraries differently from all previous generations, which is to say they do not use libraries very much. The future challenge is to design library facilities and services to serve this bifurcated society and to attract a young and technologically sophisticated generation.

It is important to keep in mind that we need to look at both continuity and change. When people examine the future we tend to look around the corner and emphasize what will be different. But in fact not everything changes.

- Gregory Raymond

There are a lot of things that libraries can do to stay relevant to the future, such as having events at the library, and making sure that people are aware of them.

- Louise Marley

If you listen carefully, you can learn what the future is telling you.

- Glen Hiemstra

- **Population growth & increased diversity, but limits to revenue/taxes.** Idaho continues to grow rapidly in total population, and this growth is expected to be sustained through 2020. Idaho is among the ten fastest growing states in the U.S. The growth is driven mostly by migration of people to Idaho, which adds to the growing diversity of population. Yet libraries, along with other public services, will face a dilemma in the next decade and a-half, as revenue and tax support are not expected to keep pace with population growth. This means that resources will consistently be stretched thin, and libraries will face competing priorities and pressures.
- **Changing technology challenges, and technology opportunities.** Developments in information technologies are expected to accelerate from now to 2020. The pace at which new and more powerful means to create, store, manage and communicate information are developed is daunting for library planning. Just when one new technological capability is put into place, a new and superior capability appears. The conclusion of project participants as they contemplated this pace of change is that it is critical that libraries and those who work for them greatly enhance their ability to anticipate and incorporate new technological opportunities. This means improved and on-going training, and staying alert to new developments.
- **Education & literacy needs increasing.** The global economy is racing ahead, and there is evidence that education and literacy in the U.S. are beginning to lag behind key global competitors. Nationally and locally adult literacy is a challenge. While libraries play an ancillary role in meeting these education gaps, this role is seen as vital for the future. There will be a growing need for life-long learning, re-training, and re-education to meet new economic challenges.
- **Information ubiquity, transparency, and challenges to privacy, freedom, and intellectual property.** The capabilities of information technologies, combined with both commercial interests and national security issues are bringing privacy issues to the foreground. The question of where privacy ends and public transparency begins will be one of continuing public policy debate. Libraries and the entire information and entertainment industry will struggle with copyright issues, digital rights, and ownership of intellectual property.

You take a look at what a Trio 650 can do today in accessing the web, playing audio, movies. It is not a big step to have a more universal device that can be worn or held in your hand that can access anything off the net.

- David Kusek

Globalization is certainly going to accelerate, widen and deepen, and it will particularly affect the labor market. There will be a great deal of stress in the job market for a number of professions and the only way to adapt will be to re-tool, and libraries will be at the center of that focus.

- Gregory Raymond

The future is going to be effected by a steady increase in transparency, and there are going to be continued arguments about transparency versus privacy.

- Brenda Cooper

- **Loss of place, roots, stability.** The changes cited above, combined with economic shifts in which whole industries and job categories are changing, shrinking, or even disappearing combine to create a sense of loss of history. Libraries are institutions in which one can prepare for the future, but they are also institutions for preserving and learning from the past. This role will grow in importance in the next 15 years.

A PREFERRED FUTURE VISION

All participants in this process worked hard to define a compelling vision for Idaho libraries. Participants are deeply committed to the historical importance of libraries and sought a vision that might assure that libraries continue to play a vital role in Idaho communities. But it is not easy to articulate this vision. Participants searched for ideas that were powerful and magnetic, yet simple and timeless. They wrestled with how “futuristic” the vision should be. Should it be full of technological marvels? Should it depart radically from previous visions or from the history of libraries? Should the future even have “libraries” at all, or should we just envision a vast sea of information in which “virtual librarians” assist people to find what they want. And if this were the future of libraries, then what happens to all of the other functions that libraries play within their communities and schools?

After deep discussion of these and similar questions, the Think Tank participants produced a set of statements describing a future vision, the common themes from several draft visions.

Idaho libraries in 2020 are

- Borderless, providing unlimited access to global information and more importantly, a single system, sharing resources and collections.
- Vital institutions, providing a spark to community, a continued gathering place, a hub for interaction, a place to be inspired.
- Learning centers, where anyone in Idaho can come to any library and learn to use global information resources in a high-touch atmosphere.
- Strongly branded, so that when people in Idaho think of libraries they think of dynamic places of passion and opportunity.

Lesson 1: The future creates the present.

Lesson 2: The people we see in 2020 will look quite different from today.

Lesson 3: Great technology revolutions are yet to come.

Lesson 4: Socially and economically the way it is, is not the way it will be.

Lesson 5: A vision must be compelling to make a difference.

Lesson 6: Futuring increases uncertainty, at least for a while.

Lesson 7: Everything possible today was at one time impossible. Everything impossible today may at some time in the future be possible.

- Glen Hiemstra

After feedback was received from all of the regional meetings, the Steering Committee refined these themes into the ultimate vision. Again, the vision for 2020 is:

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Idaho libraries are the nexus of global information, innovative services and community, enabling us to sustain our history, empower our present, and create our future.

The vision speaks for itself, yet each word and phrase carries meaning that can be amplified. One way to do this is to imagine a young person or digital native's view of libraries in 2020.

The Library is a place where I can...

- Invent
- Study
- Read for pleasure
- Meet
- Dream
- Have coffee
- See neighbors
- Learn
- Grow
- Debate
- Explore
- Share ideas
- Get ideas
- Create ideas
- Ask questions
- Get answers
- Talk to people with similar interests
- Teach
- Play
- Develop my mind
- Find knowledge
- Be inspired
- Touch the past...and the future

The library profession is in the position of a St. Bernard dog, with a keg of brandy around its neck wading through the snow, and that's a very useful thing. But we're in a world drenched in brandy, lakes of it, oceans of it, rivers of it. What is the dog supposed to do then? Maybe he should jump in the lake, grab people by the collar and haul them to dry land.

- Bruce Sterling

Another way to understand the vision is to consider the definitions the Steering Committee used as they struggled with and selected the final wording of the vision.

Amplifying the Vision – The Vision Context

A Nexus: A connection or connected group; the center or focus.

Global Information: The limitless range of information made available via yet unknown communications technologies of 2020, plus shared collections in a variety of media.

Innovative services: Services that evolve from continual innovation, from staff open to making many small mistakes quickly, and that may range in 2020 from traditional story time to virtual stacks and Artificial Intelligence reference assistance.

Community: Rooted in communities, both physical and virtual, while sharing a network and purpose statewide.

Sustain our History: Actively preserve where we have come from, where we have been, and the wisdom gained from our past experiences.

Empower our Present: Provide all Idaho residents with the power to enrich their lives through vital information, recreation, 2020 technology access and training, and inviting spaces for gathering and education.

Create our Future: Foster creativity and dreams, provoke change for a better future.

Digital natives approach life differently than do the rest of us. We are digital immigrants, but they have grown up in this digital country. Thus, according to Marc Prensky, digital natives engage in the following differently than you and I...

- Communicating*
- Sharing*
- Buying & Selling*
- Exchanging*
- Creating*
- Meeting*
- Dating*
- Collecting*
- Coordinating*
- Evaluating*
- Gaming*
- Learning*
- Searching*
- Analyzing*
- Growing up*
- Evolving*

**GETTING THERE -
STATE AND LOCAL STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS**

Statewide Strategies

Four priority strategic directions at the statewide level are recommended by the Steering Committee. This is not a step-by-step strategic plan. It is rather a set of key strategies that, if pursued, will have the effect of aiming the Idaho library community toward the vision. The details of how to implement these strategic directions are to be worked on in 2006 and beyond.

- **Develop ways to reach digital natives.** These are the generations growing up with computers and the net since infancy, and currently they are very low users of library services. We must study their needs and discover ways to serve those needs.
- **Innovate!** Create a Special Projects Library Action Team (SPLAT) to act in the “crows nest” capacity, searching for innovation, proposing and leading experiments and pilot projects, and discovering new opportunities. This will begin with a statewide team, but could later be extended to regions or localities.
- **Establish an Idaho libraries brand or identity.** Seek professional assistance to establish a dynamic brand identity for Idaho libraries as a whole.
- **Produce scenarios.** Create a scenario development effort, involving a team of people who work year-round to produce several alternative plausible scenarios for the future of libraries, and update and communicate these scenarios periodically.

Additional State Level Strategies

The Steering Committee listed several additional strategy ideas to be considered. Many of these items are already underway. Others may be initiated as time and budgets allow.

- Establish training opportunities that address:
 - Developing technology expertise, and improving attitudes toward technology
 - Leadership education for library trustees
 - Conducting community needs surveys
- Help with funding strategies:
 - Fund and coordinate pilot projects
 - Fund and coordinate digitization projects
 - Expand grant searches; for example
 - Ask Apple to assist with a project for kids and iPods, discovering all the information uses that might be possible with iPods
 - A grant for creating the content rich environments of the future
- Conduct a statewide survey on future library needs and attitudes

A strategy is a direction implying a set of actions to be sustained over some period of time, in order to move toward the vision. 2020 Vision identified strategies to be led at the state level, and recommended local strategies to be taken up by individual libraries and districts.

Make a lot of small mistakes fast. Don't try to aim for a perfect solution that you think will last for a thousand years. Be aware that you are in a very turbulent period and help each other out.
- Bruce Sterling

- Assist local libraries in learning how to implement strategies locally:
 - Statewide speakers bureau
 - Find cheerleaders, champions for libraries
 - Create a web page for sharing success stories, perhaps on www.lili.org
- Fight apathy

Local Level Strategies

It is clear that achieving the vision depends on libraries working together. Yet at the same time, achieving the vision depends even more on local actions and initiatives. These must be created at the local level, where people know their local communities and needs. Here is a list of ideas of local strategies.

- **Dedicate time to shaping the future.** This is the most important local strategy. Rather than waiting for someone else to do something, make it a time and budget priority locally to shape the local future.
- **Help implement the statewide vision.** Volunteer for, and create pilot projects. Support your staff's participation in state level projects with time and travel.

Additional Local Strategy Suggestions

- Be a part of the community, not apart from it
 - Speak to and work with local groups. Get out of the library and into the community
 - Do surveys and focus groups to know the community better
 - Openly solicit ideas from local stakeholders
- Do digitization projects
- Keep up with and embrace technology
- Become experts with technology and local resources for using technology
- Create an "e-branch"
- Secure funding, both public and private
- Collaborate with other libraries and other stakeholders
- Do local history projects
- Be willing to try and to fail

At Berklee music we found that by setting up a separate team to look at the virtual space, we were able to move much more quickly. We weren't bound by a lot of the politics of the existing organization. We weren't bound by any tradition, we could think brand new and we could go after the opportunity with a fresh view.

- David Kusek

THE CHALLENGE OF THE FUTURE

The next 15 years will be critical ones in the history of libraries. It is entirely possible to imagine a future in which libraries as we have known them become irrelevant to the point that many disappear altogether. This is the urgency to strive for a compelling vision.

At the same time, it is just as possible to imagine a future in which libraries have an enhanced and even more vital role in their communities and schools. As islands of wisdom in vast seas of data and information, libraries can be the most central of all institutions to learning societies. And it is a learning society that we must strive to be in order to flourish in this 21st Century.

Libraries cannot become these vital institutions by doing the same things they have always done. We must learn and grow ourselves if we are to be leaders in learning.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why is the vision so short, after so much time was spent creating it?

The Steering Committee that finalized the vision adopted the Albert Einstein philosophy: "Everything should be made as simple as possible, but not simpler." A good vision has sufficient detail that those who use it know what it means, but not more. One of the best visions ever written, by a company named Komatsu, had just two words: Encircle Caterpillar.

Aren't we already accomplishing the vision today?

In some ways, yes. Libraries have eternal historical and cultural values, and these are not likely to be that different in fifteen years. Thus, a vision for 2020 will sound similar to today (see Idaho libraries' 1998 description of its Preferred Future for 2008 at www.lili.org/futures). However, the way in which we choose to work toward the vision will change. A discussion thread throughout the 2005 futures process addressed the need for bolder strategies at both the state and local levels.

Knowing how to think about the future is becoming increasingly urgent as the pace of change in our world accelerate.

- Edward Cornish,
Futuring: The Exploration of the Future

Do not ask for answers to be given you. If given, they would not be yours and you could not live them. Instead, live in the questions and little by little the answers will come. And you will live them also.

- Rainer Rilke

Where is the “Buck Rogers,” the cool futures stuff?

We thought about putting some futuristic sounding language in (“virtual reality librarians,” for example) but opted to suggest innovation and openness to change, since we expect there to be several technology development cycles in the next fifteen years. We need to be ready to use future technologies, and cannot actually name them now.

I don’t see any action items and time lines. Where is the actual plan?

Preferred future planning has three phases: Foresight, or attempting to understand the long-range future as well as we can; Strategic Decision Making, or deciding on future directions with a vision and broad strategies; and Strategic Planning, or making action plans to implement the strategic directions. This project was designed to accomplish the first two phases. The third phase is yet to come, at the statewide level and at the local level. We will all be deciding how to implement the strategic directions.

Why isn’t my favorite idea in here?

The Steering Committee worked hard to incorporate key ideas from the Think Tank that took place in August 2005, and from all the regional workshops that followed. There were many common and overlapping ideas and themes. Look again at the vision and strategy recommendations and you will probably find your idea suggested or implied. But of course not every idea suggested made it through the final cut.

When will this vision be finished? How will I know?

The nature of a preferred future vision is that it will change as we move toward it. The world will change in both predictable and surprising ways and some things will surprise us by staying constant. So the vision will have to be adjusted and renewed as we go. At the same time, we ought to be able to see whether Idaho libraries are “the nexus” described in the vision in the year 2020.

Where will the money come from to accomplish the vision?

The funding will come from the same sources that developed library services to date: local property taxes (public and school libraries); state general account funds (state academic libraries, State Library, LiLI Databases, LiLI Unlimited – we hope); and a variety of public and private funding sources. The Steering Committee recommends that the library community find funding for more pilot projects and take a bolder approach to securing significant grant funding.

I skate to where the puck is going to be, not where it is.
- Wayne Gretzky

Most people still seem unaware that the basic rules are changing ... It means reevaluating issues in new terms ... The straight-line future runs flat into a wall.
- Alvin Toffler

What does nexus mean?

A nexus is a connection or a connected group, or the center or focus of things that come together. We felt this word captured the core vision of future libraries well.

What or who are “digital natives?”

This is a term coined by Marc Prensky to describe the millennial generation born since about 1980, or born since computers were commonly used. Think of kids growing up with the Internet; doing homework and shopping and interacting on the Web since they could type on a keyboard. Currently, in various studies and in practice, digital natives indicate that the library is not terribly relevant to them. We think it is important to discover how to reach and serve digital natives over the next 15 years.

What’s an e-branch?

Our concept of an e-branch is a library website that allows its patrons to use its services through the web. Designing and creating content for an e-branch produces results very different than many library websites which only describe the services available. See Halifax Public Libraries at www.halifaxpubliclibraries.ca and Thomas Ford Memorial Library, www.fordlibrary.org, as examples.

How do I become an expert in technology?

“Expert” is a relative term, and we probably can’t all be one. One scenario might be that most members of the Idaho library community are familiar with current and emerging information technologies. We don’t have to know how it works, but we need to know the basics of using it. Said another way, we know enough to talk about these technologies with the Digital Natives who use them and to think about ways we can use these technologies to deliver our services.

Where’s the training going to come from to accomplish all this?

Training – formal, informal, daily experience – will come from all around us: older library folks mentoring younger ones, Digital Natives mentoring Digital Immigrants, online courses, learning from many small mistakes made quickly, self-guided discovery, blogs, the Idaho Library Association and other conferences, testing new technologies, participating in pilot projects, etc. And the State Library will incorporate training that supports the vision in its Continuing Library Education Plan. In this environment, we must each take responsibility for our own continual learning, and share what we learn with our peers.

Do not limit your children to your own learning, for they were born into a new time.

- Ancient Proverb

Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future.

- John F. Kennedy

When will I find the time? What will I give up to do this?

These are questions each of us must answer for ourselves. You might first ask yourself how committed you are to this vision on a scale of -1 (I'll work against it) to +3 (This is vital to libraries in Idaho; I'll devote my career to it). If your commitment is at the high end of the scale, everything you do should support the vision. Review how you spend your time and your library's programs and services, and ask yourself "Does this effectively support the vision of Idaho libraries in 2020?" If the answer is "no," put it on the "Give up" list.

What happens if I don't do this?

An interesting and perhaps dismal scenario could be developed around this question. A one word answer might be "Nothing." And nothing happening in a library could quickly lead to Joe Jane's image in the Think Tank DVD of the library that disappears because no one cares. Working toward this vision undoubtedly is not the only path to libraries flourishing in Idaho. However, it is the one crafted by a dedicated group of Idaho library staff through this process, and all of us working together to achieve it has a high chance of success.

Will libraries exist in 2020?

We don't know the answer to that. History says libraries will exist in 2020. But it may depend more on what we do between now and then than it does on what has happened up till now.

Who do I contact if I want to know more?

Contact a member of the Futures Steering Committee or some of the Futures Think Tank Participants. Watch for postings on LibIdaho for opportunities to participate in more futures discussions, planning, and initiatives. Go to the Futures Blog at www.lili.org/futures to read what other members of the Idaho library community are thinking about and to post your own thoughts. The Idaho Library Association plans to offer more opportunities to discuss our vision for 2020 at its regional and annual conferences.

Leaders think for themselves, and they don't always do what they're told. They learn, and weigh, and decide. They create the future.

- Treese to Rachel in *Building Harlequin's Moon* by Nevin and Cooper

The wise leader exploits change.

- David Pearce Snyder

APPENDECIES can be found at www.lili.org/futures

Steering Committee Members

Think Tank Participants

Think Tank Summary



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