

HARNEY COUNTY LIBRARY STRATEGIC PLAN 2021-2026



Honor our past. Embrace our future.

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APPRECIATION

The Advisory Board would like to thank all those people who contributed their time and energy to make this plan possible. This list includes former members of the board, everyone that took part in the Focus Groups, Debbie Pfeiffer, Kathy Rementeria, and the Harney County Library staff.

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INTRODUCTION

Libraries are the community's public forum, creating a welcoming environment for all. Libraries provide free access to information, a place for open dialogue, and a comfortable public space. With change as a constant, a public library dedicated to meeting the community's needs must practice adaptability. Staff, services and physical spaces require flexibility in order to grow and change with the community.

Harney County Library's first strategic plan, which ran from 2013 to 2018, focused on building adaptability and responsiveness into our services. Some of our accomplishments include:

COOL (Connecting Our Own Libraries) Project

The library implemented COOL in School District #3 during 2016. Slater and Hines Middle School libraries became members of SAGE, library cards were issued to all students K-8th grade, and an HCL staff member was hired as a school librarian by Harney County School District #3. The ESD (Education Service District) library also became a member of SAGE and rural school district teachers have COOL cards.

Pre-COOL

We purchased backpacks with books and a DVD on the importance of reading. These are rotated among Early Childhood Center students to take home each week.

Little Free Libraries

We have established little libraries throughout the community.

Seed Library

Donations from seed companies were received from the library and planted in gardens throughout the community.

This 2021-2026 plan incorporates the goals and many of the strategies from the previous plan along with new ideas for meeting those goals. Our current realities of COVID-19 and the need to support equity, diversity and inclusion of all people present us with many challenges but also opportunities for improving our services.

In the coming years, Harney County Library faces significant challenges implementing this new plan for the future; securing stable funding and remaining flexible in the face of continued advances in digital media and technologies. However, one fundamental thing about the Harney County Library will not change. It will always be the place where everyone is welcome, and where everyone belongs.

Goal 1

Website and Technology : *Ensure that patrons and staff have access to established and emerging technologies and the opportunity to achieve technological literacy.*

We recognize the importance of continuing to examine the role of technology in a deliberate and critical manner. We aim to carefully evaluate emerging technologies for our patrons, rather than to immediately adopt leading-edge products and devices before they have been adequately tested. We can then incorporate appropriate new technologies in a mindful way that responds to the community's needs and maintains our commitment to being a good steward of public financial resources.

Using public computers or the wireless connection is one of the top three reasons for using the library. According to the US Census Bureau American Community Survey, about 84% of Oregon households have broadband internet access. In Harney County the number is 75%. The library serves the need of those who do not have Internet access. Wireless service is available in and around the library 24/7 for patrons and travelers. Even people with their own home computers use library public computers because of the faster connection speed, the convenience of the library's location, or due to temporary loss of access at home.

Goal 1 Strategies:

- A) Promote existing website.
 - 1. Continue to maintain and upgrade our website to improve graphics, navigation, and clarity.

- B) Investigate new methods for presenting programs online for the community.
 - 1. Investigate self-checkout, which would be convenient for the patron and may make staff more available to help other patrons.
 - 2. Provide increased technology training opportunities, making sure patrons of all ages and socioeconomic backgrounds are comfortable with technology.
 - 3. Identify staff training needs and promote staff development with new formats to ensure staff has the technology resources and competencies necessary to improve customer service and efficiency.

- C) Continue to update computers and software. Hardware and software should always be current enough to be supported by the manufacturer. Aging computers and older version software for staff and patron use must be updated as possible.
 - 1. Library Director should continue to update computers as funds become available.
 - 2. Explore ways to count number of internet users.
 - 3. Explore grant opportunities for additional funding.
 - 4. Ensure software on all public and staff computers are similar versions for consistency.

Goal 2

Serving Rural Patrons : *Expand library services to rural patrons for the purpose of bridging distance-related obstacles.*

Harney is the largest county in Oregon by area. A large portion of the population lives in the Burns/Hines city limits with the remainder spread throughout the countryside. The library is in the middle of Burns, a location convenient to those in adjacent neighborhoods but about 4 miles from Hines and 30 – 120 miles from some of the outlying communities. With such a widespread population the question arose, “Is the library serving our rural patrons?”

Goal 2 Strategies:

- A) Seek volunteers to act as liaison between the library and rural communities.
 - 1. Volunteers could explain and offer library services in rural areas on a regular basis.
 - 2. Volunteers could explain and offer library services at special events such as the Harney County Fair, the Rural School Health & Safety Fair in October, the annual May rural school music festival and track meet in Crane, and the annual Frenchglen fair.

- B) Expand our COOL (Connecting Our Own Libraries) project to rural schools by issuing COOL library cards to all rural students.

- C) Explore rural courier service. Once the rural patron, student or adult, has checked out a book online, the task is to get the book out and back efficiently.
 - 1. Explore the possibility of funding for regular courier service and/or books by mail.
 - 2. Explore collaboration with ESD to provide courier services.

- D) Investigate opening branch libraries for the rural community population.

- E) Expand our Little Free Library network.

Goal 3

Formation of a library district : *The residents of Harney County would be better served by the formation of a library district versus the current County Court funding. The formation of a district will require registered voter approval.*

The library is a county department, funded by the general fund. In the past the County Court has been very supportive of the library. Recent county financial challenges have put the future of the library in jeopardy. This is a compelling reason to proceed with formation of a library district.

Many years ago there was a Friends of the Library (FOL) group, but they are no longer active. A FOL group could be instrumental in the formation of a library district.

Goal 3 Strategies

- A) Learn the steps involved in forming a library district. Talk to people who have been involved in district formation.
- B) Find out how to create a successful ballot measure.
- C) Figure out how much the tax base must be to operate the library.
- D) Form a committee or a Friends of the Library group to lead the effort.

Goal 4

Maintaining and Enhancing Funding : *Identify and secure resources and funding necessary to implement the strategic plan and improve our current levels of service.*

Harney County Library is a department of the county with operating expenses covered by the general fund. The annual budget, which must be approved by the County Court, consists of two parts:

1) salaries and 2) materials and services. The annual library budget is prepared by the director, approved by the Library Advisory Board and finalized by the County Court.

Prior to 2018, the library budget was increasing at a reasonable rate as staff were awarded cost of living raises and certain materials and services were more robustly supported. In 2018, Harney County administration discovered an error in their general fund finances. This led to immediate and drastic budget cuts across all departments as well as employee furlough days. Since that time, the library has lost a half time employee and 20% of revenue. This presents challenges, especially when introducing new programs and services.

The library has an endowment with Oregon Community Foundation managed by the Harney County Library Foundation (HCFL). A Spending Policy Agreement requires HCLF to meet with the County Court to negotiate an annual distribution from the endowment fund to be used by the county in support of the library's operation and maintenance. Currently, this distribution represents approximately 20% of the library's budget.

The library has actively sought outside grants for special projects, such as new public computers, upgrade of the Western Room equipment, implementing the COOL project in school libraries, etc., but the main grant writer is the director, who must balance grant writing with other duties.

Goal 4 Strategies

- A) Maintain a working relationship with the Library Foundation.
- B) Continue to assess and evaluate grant opportunities.
- C) Suggest fundraising events.

Goal 5

Facility : *Assure an inside environment that is inviting, user friendly and meets future needs and an outside environment that is well maintained and reflective of Harney County.*

People are very positive about the library facility. Visitors often comment on what a beautiful and comfortable library we have.

Yet, to keep it in good condition is a challenge. The library has no maintenance department. When something needs to be done, inside or outside of the building, the appropriate business is called in to perform a specific job. As a result, most work is done to correct a problem. There are several areas outside that need some attention, paint or otherwise. The front entry is the first view of the library by the public and should be welcoming as well as nicely maintained. A volunteer has done all of the recent upkeep.

Focus group participants were divided on the hours of operation. Some want the library open earlier, some wish we stayed open later in the evening, some want longer Saturday hours and all were evenly divided on the question of opening on Sunday. One request from the group was for consistent hours of operation. Currently, the library opens at 10:30 am on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday. Due to the large number of families who attend Storytime on Wednesday morning, the library doesn't open until noon. Short hours on Saturday (12-4 pm) are due to budget limits on staffing.

Lack of meeting space results in the library being closed during Storytime on Wednesday and dictates when programs can occur due to the necessity that programs must be held after regular operating hours. Limiting factors for expanding hours include a small staff and the fact that the current facility also hosts all library activities including lectures and other presentations, regular children's programs, Teen Night, and the annual Summer Reading Program. These programs are scheduled around the existing library hours. Additional space, such as an annex, is needed for these activities. Rearranging library furniture and displays before and after programs takes staff time and effort. With an annex devoted to library programs, there would be a minimum of staff time needed to move things. This would free up some staff time to be used for other library purposes.

Many libraries have created Makerspaces within their buildings. These are collaborative areas where people meet to create and share DIY projects. They may contain resources such as 3-D printers, recording equipment or robotics or it can just be a space with crafting materials. A Makerspace has been discussed by staff, but questions remain: where would it be located, who would set it up, will the community use it?

Goal 5 Strategies:

- A) Involve the Harney County Museum in talks about optimizing the assets of both the museum and the library with the goal of creating a shared meeting space.
- B) Obtain the empty lot across the street for the purpose of expansion.
- C) Improve and enhance the exterior of library building.
- D) Explore further whether the hours of operation of the library are adequate.
- E) Investigate Makerspace options and implement as appropriate.
- F) Consider an off-library annex built using primarily grant money. The purpose of the building will be to provide room for library programs, presentations, and projects such as the Summer Reading Program.

Appendix A

Planning Process

In March 2018, the Harney County Library Advisory Board began a comprehensive formal review of the *Harney County Library Strategic Plan 2013-2018*. Although the plan was re-evaluated annually, the purpose of this review was to examine the existing plan in totality and project its continuing relevancy into the next five years. This involved rewriting the mission statement; developing a vision statement; and evaluating the plan's existing five goals to see to what extent they had been met and if they should be kept as is, amended, or dropped. The Advisory Board also needed to add new goals if appropriate.

The vision was developed by the Board with the guidance of the Library Director and input from the Library staff. In addition to input from the Library staff and director, re-evaluating the goals was aided by the paper, *Harney County Library: Needs Assessment*, co-written by former staff member Debbie Pfeiffer as part of coursework needed for her to complete her degree. In addition, the Library facilitated three focus group meetings. A wide variety of community members were invited to attend. The meetings were held outside the Library to attract people who were not currently Library users. The groups met in June 2019 and phone interviews were also done.

Strategies for meeting goals such as forming a library district and maintaining and enhancing funding were also informed by the Library Foundation Board, the Harney County Court, and other Harney County officials.

This strategic plan is designed to guide the Harney County Library through the year 2026 and will be re-evaluated annually.

Questions for Focus Groups

Not all questions were asked in every focus group.

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How do you use the library?

1. What do you get from the library that you don't get elsewhere?
2. If you could make any changes to the library or its services, what would you suggest?
3. What do you think the library should offer that it isn't?
4. What are your frustrations dealing with the library?
5. What is most important to you about the library?

What programs/services are most important?

1. How aware are you of library services? Which ones most valuable? Are you aware of all the online resources the library offers? Library 2 Go, Sage catalog, Rocket Languages? Do you use?
2. What would you like to see on the library's website?
3. How (where) do you get your reading material?
4. When you need information, how do you go about finding it?
5. Do you use a computer to access entertainment? Do you use streaming services? eBooks? Digital audio books?

What is your concept of a fabulous library?

1. What new events would you like to see at the library and which events would you like to see repeated?
2. What do you think should be the library's priorities in the next 5 years?
3. Fabulous libraries may have: (list qualities of a fabulous library).

What role do you think the library plays in the community?

1. What do you get from the library that you don't get elsewhere?
2. What needs do you see HCL fulfilling for area residents?
3. What are some issues facing people in your stage of life?
4. How does the library impact Harney County's quality of life?

Focus Groups: Response Compilation

What do you get from the library that you don't get elsewhere?

- The Library is central to the community. It's a gathering place that promotes education and literacy. This is especially true in a low-income area where families may lack the money to buy books.
- The Library as a community or social outlet – keeping in touch with people and events.
- Library is comfortable and welcoming: is clean and well-lit (high ceilings and large windows).
- Librarians are helpful, knowledgeable, and make good book recommendations.
- Recent arrival sections for print, DVDs, etc., show patrons what is newly available in these formats.
- Nice to be where there are other people who are interested in books and other media.
- Not too quiet; you can feel free to have a conversation.
- The Western History Room has information that is hard to find. The History Room staff works hard to find the answer to specific questions.
- Excellent programs including children's and evening programs.

What do you think the library should offer that it isn't?

- Streaming services available through the Library website.
- Stop charging fines. Another participant thought fines should be retained because they "teach kids things, especially since they can 'work off' their fines."

Programs:

- More programs.
- More children's programs. Kids programs are great resources that connect kids with the Library and the community and make it possible for kids to be with other kids their own age.
- More presentations on carefully chosen topics such as preserving foods and other rural life topics.
- Other practical programs on life skills training, such as how to apply for a job.
- More events that attract younger people (up to mid-30s) such as Pub Trivia.
- Programs/workshops on how to use electronic devices such as cell phones and computers.

- Create a “Friends of the Library” volunteer program with paid staff coordinators. The Library should provide volunteer opportunities to enable volunteers to learn soft skills such as effectively interacting with the public.

Outreach:

- Establish a liaison with outside resources such as the Senior Center, Frontier Art Center, and the Chamber of Commerce for upcoming events and programs. For example, announcing programs at the Wednesday meal at the Senior Center.
- Partner with other agencies, but do not duplicate services; for example, use the Senior Center for workshops.
- Ask patrons for email addresses to send evening program information.
- Rotate the County Commissioners to the Library Board.
- More knowledge of Library events; put a calendar of events on the Library’s Facebook page.
- Programs need more advertising.
- Improving services to rural areas:
 - Logging on to the Sage system from home
 - Volunteers delivering books to very rural patrons
 - Little Free Libraries in areas such as John Day, Seneca, and Frenchglen were mentioned
- Promote the Library’s website.

Access:

- Sage system is hard to use, complex, and can’t renew books on Sage.
- Bookmobiles (are costly).
- Library should be open longer hours, especially on Saturdays for patrons who must travel to get to town. Also, the Library should have Sunday hours. A proposed solution is 24-hour access using a key card.
- Better interface with Library2Go and Kindle Unlimited.
- Make it possible to order books through the Library’s website.
- Increase awareness of lesser known services available through the website such as Rocket Languages and the data bases available to patrons; increase awareness of Learning Express.
- Older people may prefer printed hard-copy books over audio or digitally delivered content.
- Currently, books in the Western History Room cannot be checked out.

Collection:

- One focus group felt that more books, periodicals, and audio books are a high priority.
- Newspapers and magazines – offer subscriptions to magazines like National Geographic, etc.
- Set aside an area for “Special” books to maintain out of print books.
- Do not discard books that have not been checked out recently.
- Strong non-fiction section including science and to find how-to information on a wide variety of topics.
- Multiple copies of *New York Times* bestsellers as a Fabulous Wish.

New District:

- A taxing district for the Library. Harney County funding is not robust. The possibility of a special district should be investigated and the level of support for a separate district be estimated. A new tax is likely to be rejected so there would have to be a new allocation of existing tax revenue.
- One comment: “I’d do anything I could to help with this!”
- A special district would create the security of knowing the library will always be here.
- It is unfair to cut the library for mistakes made by the County administration, not the library; Flyers in the library about the budget cuts were effective.

Facility:

- Maker spaces (STEM activities, repair classes, video production, etc.).
- Make a meeting room. Can the Teen Room be used for others when there are no teens in it?
- Create a social area in the Library – a coffee shop or area that serves as a social resource; a meeting place for book clubs, etc.

Ages and Stages:

- For the older: What to expect from old age: medical knowledge and combating feeling marginalized and isolated as basic human contact becomes more difficult. The Library can be a welcoming place to help foster social contact as well as providing access to health information and programs or information on dealing with memory loss.
- For the “sandwich generation,” providing information on accessing transportation, self-reliance, grandparents raising grandkids, foster care. Daycare is a huge issue.
- For the Young adults, many want to go “back to nature” because they are disillusioned with technology.

- Outreach to children, such as the kids' programs, is very important because early exposure to libraries will create life-long library users.
 - Library could help ameliorate school quality issues in Harney County.
 - This could include resources to deepen a student's knowledge of an area or topic and providing resources for supplementary learning over the summer so students do not forget what they learned during the previous school year.
- Several participants noted that when they moved here, one of the first places they went to was the Library. The Library helped integrate them into their new community.

