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Developing a Strategic Plan for Hingham Public Library, Massachusetts

Part One: Mission, Vision & Value Statements, Environmental Scan, and SWOT Analysis

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### **Abstract**

This is part one of a two-part analysis regarding strategic planning for the Hingham Public Library in Hingham, Massachusetts. A review of current literature on environmental scanning with a focus on gathering information within libraries is included along with newly developed and recommended mission, vision and value statements for Hingham Public Library. An environmental scan detailing attributes of the library, surrounding area, and an evaluation of the library's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats are also examined. The environmental scan and mission, vision, and values are relevant to this library as it transitions through a period of change following significant retirements that have prompted a closer evaluation of the staffing model as well as a closer examination of how the library can continue to remain relevant to the community of Hingham as the global information and technology landscape continues to change.

*Keywords:* Hingham Public Library, environmental scan, SWOT, strategic planning

## **Developing a Strategic Plan for Hingham Public Library, Massachusetts**

### **Part One: Mission, Vision & Value Statements, Environmental Scan, and SWOT Analysis**

The Hingham Public Library is located in Hingham, Massachusetts and serves a suburban community of over 22,000 residents. The library is a member of the Old Colony Library Network (OCLN), a cooperative of 29 libraries, which in turn belongs to the Massachusetts Library System (MLS), a state-supported collaborative that supports resource sharing, delivery services, and continuing education opportunities throughout the state. Successful strategic planning for the library will take into account the needs of the local community. Increased funding needs, projected community growth, and changes in the organizational structure due to staff retirements should also be considered as important factors in the strategic planning process. Environmental scanning, combined with a thorough analysis of the library's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) will contribute to the ability of the library to fulfill its' mission, vision, and value statements, and to meet and exceed the needs and expectations of the local community by providing resources, training, services, programs, and a welcoming physical space.

### **Literature Review**

Evans and Ward (2007) describe environmental scanning as the “process for gathering information about activities, trends, relationships, competitors, potential dangers, and any other factor in the environment that could impact on the organization” (p. 45). This literature review will investigate the factors and trends that go into the environmental scan (ES) for libraries, distinctive schools of thought, methodologies used to retrieve information and critiques of the environmental scan. For public libraries, a consistent assessment helps to enable valuable and high quality free services for diverse communities living in a changing landscape of information access and technology.

### **The Purpose of Environmental Scanning**

Environmental scanning can be a valuable process for any organization. Sager (1999) states “libraries need to scan their environment in order to understand external forces of change, so that they may develop effective responses that secure or improve their position in the future” (p. 283). A thorough understanding of what may impact the organization both externally and internally will enable managers to successfully guide staff through the changes and challenges that arise. Castiglione (2006) cautions, “Library administrators who remain unaware of external-change, or minimize the importance that such change may have on library operations may lose significant opportunities to respond- in a timely fashion- and develop services that are valued by the stakeholder” (p. 529). A timely response is the first aspect of environmental scanning that demonstrates the commitment an organization has to its users. As Abels (2002) states, “[t]he importance of environmental information depends on the degree to which the success of the organization itself depends on its environment” (p. 16) and for libraries as publicly funded spaces, this is critical.

As publicly funded organizations, libraries are influenced by external politics, the economy, and social factors, and strongly affected by changes in technology and regulatory factors. Most libraries would fall into a category of “dominated industry/dominant environment” as opposed to “dominant industry/dominated environment” or a “symbiotic relationship” between the two (Abels, 2002, p. 17). As Castiglione (2006) notes, in order for environmental scanning to be effective, it must be an ongoing process rather than a one time project or reaction to sudden events (p. 529). A lack in response time will prove dangerous for libraries as information access and technology trends continue to change rapidly.

### **Ongoing Trends and Environmental Scanning**

Environmental scanning is useful when considering the reality of societal change and its impact as an external force upon libraries. Zabel (2005) emphasizes four factors or trends that drive change, and “all of them challenge libraries to rethink the delivery of services” (p. 104). These four factors are budgets, technology, the millennial generation, and competition.

One of the largest factors affecting public libraries is shrinking budgets that affect not just the collection, databases and services offered but also the staff hired. “Libraries across the country are being forced to explore new staffing models because of budget reductions” (Zabel, 2005, p. 104). Staffing models have the potential to affect the quality of service that staff can provide to the community as they are asked to take on more tasks during fewer hours. As more libraries promote themselves as spaces for the community, the staffing models that focus on customer service will be of greatest value.

Another factor Zabel (2005) explores is that the generation born after 1981 are in a demographic group known as Millennials, and “they are the generation grabbing headlines” (p.

104). Due to this growing user demographic of power browsers who digest information and media in a completely new way, “it is not surprising that academic librarians are trying to figure out the best way to reach these users” (Zabel, 2005, p. 105), who have “embraced instant messaging, cell phones, mp3 players, and multitasking” (Zabel, 2005, p. 104) on a daily basis. The rapid changes in technology and the ease that this generation uses technology make a combination of factors in the library environment of which planners must be very aware.

Competition is another factor, often in the form of big box bookstores. Some libraries are reacting to this by “...improving the library’s facilities and atmosphere so [it] would be more like a popular bookstore chain” (Zabel, 2005, p. 105). As technology access becomes more universal and eBooks continue to grow in popularity, it is important for libraries to recognize and acknowledge the shift in traditional notions of library service and rather examine the library as a “...place for teaching, learning, research, community, and fun” (Zabel, 2005, p. 105).

### **Distinctive Schools of Thought**

The library as a community space is taken a step further by two distinctive schools of thought that focus on the importance of cultural competency and human interaction in the library and how it can affect the results of environmental scanning.

Globalization has created a wide range of cultural characteristics that shape the way people interact and has developed a need for cultural competency amongst library staff. Many information organizations in diverse communities assist patrons of different backgrounds for a wide range of needs. Therefore, it is imperative that organizations are aware of socio-cultural factors that Evans and Ward (2007) describe as “...values, attitudes, demographics, historic context, and customs of the society in which the organization operates” (p. 46).

In addition to cultural competency another distinctive school of thought comes from Rahim and Marvel (2011) who examine emotional intelligence in relation to environmental scanning. “[W]e argue a person’s ability to exercise emotional intelligence (EQ) influences their ability to work across departments or functions to effectively scan the environment for new opportunities or threats within the social context of established firms” (p. 84). In order to test which aspects of emotional intelligence most influence environmental scanning, the authors conducted a study in the United States, Bangladesh, Greece, and China, which are in a continuum going from a more individualistic to a more collectivist culture. This was a rather complicated study with recommendations for managers depending on the type of culture they are in (Rahim & Marvel 2011, p. 97). They concluded that empathy and social skills, two aspects of emotional intelligence, are unique and effective tools for gathering hard to access information from the community.

As communities diversify and grow, it is important to consider cultural competency and emotional intelligence as two important factors that can contribute to a successful and positive library experience for all. In terms of accessibility and usage, socio-cultural “...factors have obvious implications for information services” (Evans & Ward, 2007, p.46). Without proper competency and emotional intelligence from staff, users may feel alienated and will seek assistance elsewhere.

### **Methodologies of Environmental Scanning**

Albright and Abels agree upon five basic steps in conducting an environmental scan:

1. Identify the needs of the organization or purpose of the scan.
2. Gather the information.

3. Analyze the information.
4. Communicate the results.
5. Report results/make decisions (Albright, 2002, p. 43-44).

The first step in environmental scanning (ES) is to identify and narrow down the needs of the organization in order to create a focus for the scan. As Castiglione (2006) states, “guarding against information overload is an extremely important aspect of any successful ES initiative” (p. 535). This is why all ES activities must begin with a careful specification of the information required, the variables to be monitored and the sources of the information to be consulted (Castiglione, 2006, p. 535). Christie Kootz (2006) describes characteristics that can give libraries an advantage when conducting an environmental scan. For instance, she notes that as librarians we are “trained to gather and organize data for use in the most effective and efficient way possible” (p. 1). Another advantage is that the library itself is a “treasure trove of data and information” (Koontz, p. 1). Much of the literature recommends that organizations plan to integrate SWOT analysis as part of the environmental scan. SWOT analysis tracks and analyzes the internal or “microenvironment” and the external or “macroenvironment” (Koontz, 2006, p. 2) and is valuable because it involves identifying internal strengths and weaknesses as well as external opportunities and threats.

The next step of environmental scanning involves how the information is gathered and from whom. Albright (2004) emphasizes that environmental scanning involves not only gathering information from the external environment in a variety of ways, but also from within the internal environment through valuable feedback from meeting results, staff, committee members and colleagues (p. 44). Gathering information at all levels of an organization creates a



more complete understanding of the organization and community. The “intent [of environmental scanning] is not merely one of information gathering; rather, its purpose is to focus on future impacts on the organization rather than those centered on the present situation” (Albright, 2004, p. 40). Sager (1999) notes that “[e]nvironmental scanning does not require either the selection of a statistically valid sample or a balanced representation. What it does require is the participation of individuals who are familiar with the issues, trends, and problems of a specific environment” (p. 286). Sager conducted an informal environmental scan in which he “posted an invitation for input on the PubLib discussion list” (p. 284) and got twenty-four responses from people in the field. Through this informal process, Sager was able to draw a list of conclusions and “the contribution of environmental scanning to library management and planning, therefore, is that it permits us to see our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats from many different perspectives” (p. 288). However, this is more than just observation, as Sager (1999) reminds us: “environmental planning engages the participants in a process that goes beyond research, into interpretation, synthesis, and consensus” (p. 288).

Aside from an emphasis on internal information, Koontz (2006) describes several types of external information that are important to an effective ES. The first is signs of change in the political, economic, social environment that can affect the library as well as “potential events on the horizon” (p. 3) such as legislation that may affect Internet privacy or copyright. Koontz recommends paying attention to experts in the field and other highly influential public figures and their predictions and being aware of indirect effects such as a sudden need to fund crime prevention which may pull funds from libraries (p. 3). This kind of information can be retrieved from multiple sources. As Castiglione (2008) states, external information sources can include

“professional conferences, radio, television and the internet, books, newspapers, journals, and commercial databases” (p. 531). Castiglione addresses the fact that there is a vast quantity of information in the external environment and it may be too much for individual libraries to be able to effectively monitor. He recommends using reliable umbrella organizations such as the ALA as a resource to monitor larger trends. Organizations such as the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) have published “an in depth and comprehensive ES that identifies and evaluates the emerging library services environment on multiple levels” (p. 533). Finally, Koontz (2006) advises anyone involved in ES to write abstracts or summaries of their findings to more easily disseminate the information to the rest of the organization ( p. 3).

### **Critiques of Environmental Scanning**

Even though “[t]here is research evidence to show that environmental scanning is linked with improved organizational performance” (Choo, 2001, para. 12) environmental scanning on its own does not guarantee improved performance or ensure marketplace position of an organization unless environmental scanning can “be aligned with strategy, and scanning information . . . effectively utilized in the strategic planning process” (Choo, 2001, para. 12). Despite research suggesting environmental scanning improves performance (Analoui, F., & Karami, A., 2002; Choo, C. W. 2001; Koo, H., Chau, K., Koo, L., Liu, S., & Tsui, S., 2011; Kumar, K., Subramanian, R., & Strandholm, K., 2001) there are inherent weaknesses that may impede the benefits of environmental scanning for an organization.

Since “[w]e tend to see what we expect to see” (Voros, 2001, p. 551), one's own perceptual biases and preconceived notions can interfere with seeing an organization's social, political, economic, and technological settings for what they currently are and what they may

become in the future. Voros (2001) refers to this idea when he concludes that "all of our scanning is undertaken through perceptual filters. It is all about filters, mindsets and world views" (p. 551). Without awareness of the existing perceptual filters within members of an organization the macro-view resulting from environmental scanning may be shallow and lacking sufficient scope. Important signals that could potentially impact an organization's effectiveness may be hidden in blind spots caused by perceptual filters. "[H]aving an environmentally deterministic point of view blurs the distinction between real environmental characteristics and the *perception* and *evaluation* of these characteristics" by an organization's leadership team (Evans and Ward, 2007, p. 48). Thus, the challenge for an organization becomes evaluating environmental signals as they really are and as they really will be, not just as they may want to see them.

Related to the perception of expected challenges in an organization's environment is the weakness of "strategic inflection points" (Huffman, 2004, p. 40). Huffman identifies a strategic inflection point as "a point of massive change" that "differ from run-of-the-mill environmental changes in that they are very large" (Huffman, 2004, p. 40). These very large changes in the environment pose a severe danger to an organization when they emerge gradually like boiling frogs in water where a "'boiled frog' company ignores environmental changes, shuts out new information which may disturb the 'official view of the world' and then fails to adapt to the new conditions" (Large, 1992, 317). Environmental scanning helps alert an organization to potential problems in the environment unless the perception of the environment is incorrect. Huffman (2004) observes that "[e]nvironmental scanning systems, which see only expected problems, warn us about those things that are no real threat in the first place" (Huffman, 2004, p. 40). Huffman (2004) describes these "asymmetric attacks" (p. 40) where an organization's competitor

is hidden from view until it is too late to stop their disruption. Huffman (2004) provides modern day examples of Intel, Microsoft, IBM, Apple Inc., the attacks of 9/11, and online retail companies exemplifying this inherent weakness of environmental scanning systems to predict asymmetric shifts in the world. Huffman (2004) concludes that "[o]rganizations must be designed to be flexible so they can adapt to change" and increase involvement and communication between management and various departments within the organization (p. 48).

### **Conclusion**

In our literature review of environmental scanning, it became clear that one of the most important factors of a successful scan is the ability to narrow down the information of the scan in a digestible fashion. Another success factor is being sure that organizations are not starting a scan with preconceived ideas about the end results of the scan. Unbiased and neutral scanning is the goal when it comes to getting the best results. Environmental scanning will not necessarily prevent organizations from ever being taken unawares by outside factors, but consistent and ongoing analysis will enable planning to help engage with our rapidly changing environment.

## **Hingham Public Library Mission, Vision, and Value Statements**

### **Mission Statement**

The Hingham Public Library's main mission is to provide resources, training, and services to assist in patrons' entertainment and research, in order to keep the population of the town, and the greater borrowing network satisfied. We see the library's mission as: 1) to make sure the patron feels welcome and comfortable while inside and outside the physical space, 2) to provide physical items (books, magazines, periodicals, CDs, etc), and, when Hingham cannot provide the item, to use Virtual Catalog and Interlibrary Loan options in order to assist the patron

in finding exactly what they are looking for, 3) to stay up-to-date on changing virtual mediums, and providing the patron with access to these mediums, (such as eBooks) and training on how to use them, 4) to make its items available to the greater borrowing network, via the Old Colony Library Network, Virtual Catalog, and Interlibrary Loan options, and 5) to be a meeting place for the community as a whole.

### **Vision Statement**

The vision of the Hingham Public Library is to meet the needs and exceed the expectations of the immediate community and the greater borrowing area by providing a wide-range of resources, training, services, and programs. As we welcome the library patron with a warm and vibrant environment, we ensure not only access to but support with technology, as well as a comprehensive inventory of more traditional library items. Striving to grow along with new interests and needs brought on by societal change, we seek to be the first choice of community members and visitors alike for planned or unplanned meetings, research, reading, and relaxing.

### **Values**

The Hingham Public Library is guided by the following core values:

- **Lifelong Learning:** We are committed to collecting and storing information to help improve the lives of patrons. We recognize the pursuit of knowledge is a lifetime pursuit that is enjoyable and rewarding made possible by materials accessible through the public library. We view the library as an essential institution to help foster the community's love for continued learning and personal development.

- **Service:** We are committed to providing the highest quality of service by ensuring library staff is well trained and well skilled in helping all library patrons. We subscribe to the idea that the primary purpose of the librarian and staff is to serve library patrons and meet their information, recreation and educational needs.
- **Open Access:** We are committed to free, public access to the collection of physical and digital media that the library makes available. We value the free and equal access by all patrons of the library using current technologies and formats and will provide relevant training for the library community to help them utilize these new mediums.
- **Building Community and Friendship:** We are committed to make the library an inviting place for the community to gather and meet as individuals, families, friends, colleagues, and neighbors. The library should be a positive, uniting force in the community to help build relationships of trust and friendship.

### **Environmental Scan**

#### **History and Demographics**

The town of Hingham is located on the southeastern coast of Massachusetts, approximately 15 miles south of Boston. Covering an area of roughly 22.5 square miles, Hingham is a mostly residential suburban coastal town with targeted areas of upscale retail development. Originally founded in 1635 by the Reverend Peter Hobart who traveled from England, Hingham was the 12<sup>th</sup> town incorporated into the Massachusetts Bay Colony (History, n.d.). Rich in history, Hingham is home to the Old Ship Meeting House, the oldest church building in continuous use in the United States built in 1681, and the Derby School, now Derby Academy, the first co-educational school in the nation founded in 1784. The town's first public

library was built in 1869 by resident Albert Fearing “long before Andrew Carnegie began, in the 1880’s, his celebrated program to endow free public libraries” (Mehegan, 2012, pp.3-4).

After the original library structure burnt down in 1879, another library was built and served as the public library until 1966, when a new building at a different location opened to serve the town’s growing needs. In 2002, the Hingham Public Library underwent a major renovation and expansion project, gaining an additional 18,000 sq. feet while updating and modernizing the physical spaces (Feingold, 2013). The library is currently a member of the Old Colony Library Network and is open 52 to 56 hours per week (opening seasonally on Sundays) with nearly 1,000 visits to the library daily. The library has holdings of over 184,000 books, magazines, CDs, DVDs, and audiobooks, and circulated over 403,000 items in the last fiscal year, including over 106,000 items to non-resident users from neighboring towns (OCLN circulation FY year to date, 2013; OCLN non resident borrowing, 2014).

In 2013, Hingham had a population 22,552 residents, and of this number a total of 12,817 residents had a library card. There are 4,240 students enrolled in the schools, and an unemployment rate of 5.1% which is below the state and national averages of 7.2% and 7.3% respectively (Nickerson, 2013, pp.122-125). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Hingham’s population is predominately white (96.8%), educated (68.4% have a bachelor’s degree or higher compared with the state average of 39%), owns a home (81.2% compared to the state average of 63.2%), and is affluent (median household income of \$104,213 and median home value of \$687,400 compared to the state median household income of \$66,665 and median home value of \$335,500) (2014).

**Funding**

The budget for the Hingham Public Library has decreased, from \$1,581,725 in 2010, to \$1,352,478 in 2012. The 2014 expected budget is an increase, which, if appropriated, will raise the library annual budget to \$1,623,538 (Town of Hingham Massachusetts, 2014).

Hingham has a plan put in place that will cost the library \$1,199,000 over five years. These costs will go into not only updating the computer lab, which will be discussed under the Technology Development section, but also to building maintenance and upkeep, as well as a parking lot expansion (Corcoran, 2014). Due to items such as this, the library is going to need all of the funding it can get, through fundraisers and budget acquisitions.

Another major source of funding is the “Roam the Tomes” fundraiser. This event took in \$56,000 (Minutes of the meeting of the board of trustees, 2013). Also, the library has an ongoing Library Book Sale on the lower level of the building. The library accepts donations. All proceeds from the book sale go towards new acquisitions (Hingham Public Library, 2014).

**Economic Trends**

Changes in the economy can have positive as well as negative effects on information services. Two primary ways in which they are affected are in determining “what one can buy with available funds and how much money will be available to spend” (Evans & Ward, 2007, pg. 46). Because information is changing rapidly it is often challenging for libraries to maintain up-to date tools and materials while working with a limited budget. On top of this they must also provide workshops and programs that educate and empower the community. Hingham Public Library is fortunate enough to have a community that is highly invested in the library and is willing to donate in order to maintain its’ quality.



Overall the current state of the economy in the United States is in an “age characterized by the switch to jobs that require and/or are characterized by increased knowledge, globalization, rapid technological change, broadband or wireless telecommunications, and the digital revolution” (Taylor, 2012, pg. 195). As the youngest generation continues to develop, Hingham Library must provide the mechanisms of teaching these valuable skills of the changing economy in order to continue to develop an educated community.

Changes in the economy can also have an effect on not only what the libraries can provide for their community but also what the community needs from their library. As stated above Hingham has a low employment rate at 5.1%. For those in that percentile, the changes in economic conditions make libraries a resource that can provide the assistance and tools needed for those with lower income to find jobs, learn valuable skills and become contributors to society.

This economy creates an environment in which public libraries “are subject to budget and resource constraints in their attempt to provide services at lease cost” (Stine, 2007, p. 525). A study conducted on the effect of library volunteers on library employment concluded that volunteers strengthen the relationship and value that the community has with the library (Stine, 2007, p. 526) and even save libraries money by having qualified volunteers execute tasks.

### **Political Changes/Trends**

As a publicly funded service, libraries are greatly affected by politics and policies that happen at local, state and national levels of government. “Any information service that derives a significant portion of its operating funds from public sources must monitor political trends” (Evans & Ward, 2007, pg. 46). These policies often effect how libraries can successfully

serve their community. Policies such as the USA PATRIOT Act, Homeland Security Act and The Children's Internet Protection Act (Jaeger, 2010, pg. 63) resulted from rising political concerns regarding copyright infringements, privacy and security without considering what types of affects these policies would have on libraries. "Changes in political discourse have created an electoral environment that is markedly less hospitable to public libraries" (Jaeger, 2010, p. 63). Hingham Public Library has all of its policies accessible through their website. Having policies that clearly outline privacy and copyright services, allows patrons to be protected, but often the information is too dense and convoluted. The library would benefit from implementing posters or visuals that deliver critical points of Internet usage, especially for those who are new to the Internet.

"Political change can also produce the possibility of additional funding if governments can be persuaded of the benefits of investing in library and information services" (Evans & Ward, 2007, p. 43). Various grants that support digital literacy and educational workshops for youth to develop skills are available. Politics and policies should not prevent libraries from providing services to their community; "the fact that library activities and contributions to their communities cannot be easily translated into monetary terms makes them easy targets for budget cuts" (Jaeger, 2010, p. 64).

### **Sociocultural Factors**

Evans & Ward (2007) describe sociocultural factors as "values, attitudes... and customs of the society in which the organization operates" (Evans & Ward, 2007, pg. 46). Hingham is a community that values the staff, space, programs and information provided by their library. With

multiple forms of contributing and fundraising being conducted by the community of Hingham, it is clear that they are a community that values this public space.

Libraries were traditionally valued for the information they carried and stored within their walls “because the major authoritative resource for education in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was the book, we became about the books and about reading, the skill needed to use them” (Rodger, 2009, p. 46). Today, as information becomes increasingly accessible, the role and value of libraries is changing. Libraries must integrate these changes and new skills into their services in order to stay relevant.

### **Vendors**

The Hingham Public Library subscribes to a number of online databases, including Reference USA, Literature Resource Center, Global Issues in Context, and Health Reference Center Academic among others. Under the Research/Databases section on the website, there are a total of 39 databases from which to choose, although 3 of the databases, Ancestry, Oxford Islamic Studies Online, and Massachusetts Special Collections Directory, must be used on workstations at the library. Another 5 databases that are fully available at the library but have limited home availability include Consumer Reports, Novelist, Morningstar, Value Line, and Heritage Quest; these are only available for home use by patrons who are residents of Hingham with a Hingham library card. However, Gale Cengage, Encyclopedia Britannica, and ProQuest are provided free to the library through a statewide online electronic database contract administered by the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners (MBLC) and the Massachusetts Library System (MLS), the statewide system of libraries that includes the Hingham Public Library (Bruno, 2012).

In addition to these databases, the library subscribes to Zinio for popular digital magazines, Indieflix for downloadable movies, Overdrive for downloadable e-books and audiobooks, and Mango for online language learning. Although the costs and collections for Zinio and Overdrive are shared among the OCLN network libraries, the library has purchased Indieflix and Mango, as well as additional e-book titles through Overdrive Advantage, specifically for Hingham library cardholders from their own budget, since licensing from these providers precludes network sharing without a substantial increase in cost. Books are mostly purchased through Ingram and occasionally Amazon, audiobooks and DVD's through Midwest Tapes, CDs through Alliance Entertainment Corporation (AEC), and periodical and newspaper subscriptions are generally purchased through Ebsco.

### **Competitors**

The Hingham Public Library is currently open for 56 hours a week, and is not open on Fridays. For comparison, another local town (Weymouth) is open for 64 hours per week, including Fridays (although Weymouth is closed on Sundays, unlike Hingham).

Weymouth also saw a 0% change in circulation statistics between 2010 and 2011. Hingham saw a 4% decrease in circulation activity, while the average for the Old Colony Network was roughly a loss of 2%. This means that while the network has gone down, Hingham has lost even more business, while one of their close competitors has remained even. While Hingham circulates more items than Weymouth, the decrease in use cannot be ignored (OCLN circulation FY year to date, 2013).

According to Old Colony Network statistics for 2013, the Hingham Public Library had a total of 387,476 checkouts at its workstation. Of these, 285,026 were for residents, or just over

73.5% of the business conducted within 2013 was for Hingham residents. Hingham town residents actually had 308,911 checkouts throughout 2013; this means that 23,885 of these checkouts happened at other libraries in the network. Of these, 3,022 checkouts were at the Weymouth Public Library, or just over 12.6% (OCLN non resident borrowing, 2014).

On this same note, let us view the statistics for Weymouth Public Library. In 2013 Weymouth had 319,122 total checkouts at their workstation. Of those, 271,273 were Weymouth residents; this is over 85% of the business that they conducted in a year. Weymouth residents had 349,847 total checkouts, meaning that 78,574 occurred at other OCLN libraries. Of these, 25,132 were at Hingham, or just under 32%, almost a third (OCLN non resident borrowing, 2014). This data all means that Hingham has more outside patrons coming in than Weymouth, regardless of hours.

The budget for the Hingham Public Library has decreased, as detailed in the section on funding. In comparison, the Weymouth town library budget was \$1,235,834 for 2012. While having longer hours and more branches, the Weymouth library cost \$100,000 less than the Hingham library (Kay, S. 2014).

Another competitor is a local bookstore: Barnes and Noble. Barnes and Noble is a megalith, doing business of over \$6.8 billion annually among its almost 700 stores and its website (Million Dollar Database; Barnes& Noble Bookseller, 2014). This particular location opened in 2004 when the shopping center was built and, “According to the developer, based on square footage, the Derby Street Shoppes is the #2 grossing mall in the United States” (Nickerson, 2010).

## **Technological Developments**

In a world of constant technological advancement, information professionals must evolve at a steady rate. One of the biggest differences that this has meant, in terms of libraries, has been when it comes to eBooks and eReaders. Hingham has had eBook resources since 2010, and already a shifting can be seen in the statistics.

When the program started in 2010, there were only 121 eBook ‘checkouts.’ This is in comparison to 439,620 checkouts of physical items. In 2013, there were 9,180 eBook checkouts. This is over 75 times greater than the first year in which the items were available. At the same time, the physical item circulation count dropped to 403,882, a drop of 8% overall, including a decrease of almost 4% just between 2012 and 2013 (Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners, 2013). The Hingham Public Library also has computers that are open to public patrons over the age of fifteen. These items do need be replaced, and are part of a budget that has been recommended for maintaining and updating the building. The computers alone, for replacement fees, will cost the library \$20,000 a year, for a total of \$100,000 (Corcoran, 2014).

Overall, Hingham has kept up with the rising technology very well. They do have 18 computers that are open to public access on a regular basis. In comparison, the average for all public libraries in the state of Massachusetts is 17 public access stations (Massachusetts public libraries – electronic services, 2014). Hingham also has 15 computers that are used solely for catalog purposes, and a computer laboratory with 12 stations, which is not always open to the public because it is used for training. Additionally, there are ports available for wired connections for patrons working on their personal computer as well as free WiFi throughout the building and courtyard for wireless devices (Hingham Public Library, 2014).

## **Legislative and Regulatory Developments**

The Hingham Public Library was incorporated in 1872 by a Special Act of the Massachusetts Legislature to serve as a public library for the town, and is governed by a Board of Trustees, comprised of between nine and eleven corporation members, 5 town residents, and three ex officio members including the town's Chairman of the Board of Selectmen, Treasurer, and Superintendent of Schools (Governance, n.d.). The Board of Trustees is responsible for hiring a certified Library Director to manage the library.

The library is a member of the Old Colony Library Network (OCLN), a cooperative of 29 member libraries, including 26 public libraries and 3 academic libraries, established in 1984 as a tax exempt non-profit corporation (Who We Are, n.d.). OCLN is governed by a nine member elected Executive Board comprised of library directors who approve the operating budget as well as network policies. The network in turn belongs to the Massachusetts Library System (MLS), a state-supported collaborative established in 2010 that supports resource sharing among libraries, manages the contract for statewide delivery service, and provides continuing education opportunities (About MLS, 2014).

Although the library is regulated by the General Laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Chapter 78, it is within these laws that the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners (MBLC) was established in 1890 to support and promote library services and to administer state appropriated funds towards that end (Laws & Regulations, n.d.). Hingham annually applies to the MBLC for funds received through State Aid to Public Libraries, and relies on these funds to supplement the local budget. Additionally, the Code of Massachusetts

Regulations (605) CMR also contains regulatory measures for libraries, including sections on Certification of Librarians (605 CMR 3.00), Free Public Library Service (605 CMR 4.00), Library Improvement Program – Public Library Construction (605 CMR 6.00), and Regional Library Systems (605 CMR 7.00) (Code of Massachusetts Regulations, n.d.).

Some of the recent legislative developments promoted by the MBLC for the upcoming fiscal year include a focus to “end the digital lockout” (Legislative Initiatives & Updates, n.d.) by increasing the number of public computers with Internet access, and by reducing vendor lending restrictions on e-books access and price disparities between print and electronic versions, supported in part through increased state funding measures (Legislative Initiatives & Updates, n.d.). Also noteworthy is the authorization in the Governor’s FY15 budget to allow the MBLC to continue to grant an unlimited number of waivers for State Aid, similar to the FY14 budget, in order to accommodate a larger than usual number of libraries who apply due to problems meeting all the necessary criteria for State Aid. Hingham was among the 93 libraries who applied for and received a waiver in FY13, and the amount of state aid received in the following fiscal year was \$14,069.68 (State Aid Awards & Certification, 2014).

### **SWOT Analysis**

#### **Strengths**

Some of the major strengths of the Hingham Public Library are reflective of a concept that has been described by Ray Oldenburg in *The Good to Great Place* as a “third place”, i.e. the place or social environment where people go after the first two places of home and work. The third place is oftentimes characterized as a place that is welcoming, free, accessible, and



comfortable, and is a place where one can meet up with friends and perhaps even enjoy some food or drink together. The Hingham Public Library serves as a strong community gathering place, with a comfortable and inviting building; numerous and appealing programs offered for all ages and interests; a large, diverse, and up-to-date collection of books, DVD's, CD's, and audiobooks; access to public computers and a wireless network for internet use; and a friendly and welcoming staff dedicated to providing strong customer service.

One of the major strengths of the library comes from the community it serves. The positive service experiences of patrons have helped to maintain the expectation that the library is a valuable resource and welcoming public space with much to offer. When patrons continue to value the library as both a physical and digital space they have the power to maintain its services and longevity.

The library building was renovated and expanded in 2002, which provided an opportunity to add features that contribute to the comfort and appeal of the physical spaces, such as an outdoor courtyard, café area, two art galleries, expanded children's areas, study rooms, and improved meeting rooms. A variety of programs are offered on a regular basis to patrons of all ages, including baby story times, author book talks, classical guitar concerts, and lifelong learning programs. The large and diverse collection is also well used and enjoyed by patrons, with over 403,000 items circulating in fiscal year 2013 (OCLN circulation FY year to date, 2013).

However, one of the greatest strengths of the library is the friendly and welcoming staff who are committed to providing strong customer service. The library was fortunate to receive a Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) grant administered by the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners (MBLC) in 2004 focusing on providing comprehensive and reproducible

customer service training to all staff, and culminating in the development of a Customer Service Policy (Customer Service Policy, 2005) that continues to guide staff training and service expectations today.

### **Weaknesses**

The largest external weakness for the library is the outdated website. For readers who are increasingly relying on web accessibility for their information, the website needs to convey the message that the library is the source to easily access accurate information as well the place to offer programs that interest and bring the community together. The current website carries an immense amount of information for patrons but is difficult to navigate, rendering much of the information inaccessible and lost in a clutter of text. A website makeover would improve the accessibility and user-friendliness for patrons to find and discover the various resources and services the library offers. The new layout would create an organization in which the most used services are clearly labeled and also a space for the promotion of upcoming events that would interest and draw patrons to the physical library. Hingham currently has a wide range of programs, services and databases that could be better promoted visually on its' website.

An internal weakness for the library comes as a result of the recent retirement of three longtime staff members and a temporary opening due to a staff member going on maternity leave. The loss of these key staff members created three new openings within the library system. This can be both a positive and negative factor as the library moves forward, depending on how the staffing is approached. The retired individuals were Department Heads, which creates a transitional time that will cause uncertainty across three different departments. The transition

between staff in these positions must be handled with great care in order to deal with any internal issues before they can affect patron experience.

### **Opportunities**

One of the greatest opportunities for the Hingham Public Library is also a potential weakness/threat, and originates from significant changes to the organizational structure and some existing staff positions. The recent retirements of three longtime staff members, as well as job movement due to promotions and a maternity leave, have resulted in the vacancies of four out of five existing department head positions within a span of three to four months. Although this undoubtedly creates some staff anxieties (Evans & Ward, 2007, p.113), this also creates multiple opportunities.

The opportunity to reallocate existing funds for the recently vacated positions has resulted in the creation of three new positions for the library that will help to respond to the current growth and increasing complexity of library operations, with a focus on collection development, technology and management. These positions are funded through the elimination and restructuring of the vacant department head positions. For example, the majority of newly purchased AV materials arrives pre-processed requiring minimal cataloging, significantly reducing the amount of processing time and involvement required by AV staff. This in turn has led to the elimination of the vacant AV department head position and a transferal of ordering responsibilities to the new position of Collection Development Librarian, creating greater efficiencies in workflow, cost, and time management, as well as greater accountability for the ongoing development of a diverse, comprehensive, and current collection.

Another opportunity that arises from the creation of these new positions is the ability for the library to address the growing need for library staff with increased technology skills. The new Information Technology Librarian will provide staff with more frequent and consistent technology training, will assist with technology troubleshooting, and will be responsible for creating and maintaining a stronger overall web presence. Utilizing the internet and social media creates an opportunity to increase and improve the marketing of library services, especially to the digital users of the library who may not take advantage of the physical library as a “third place”. The changes experienced at all existing levels of the organizational structure will create new opportunities for staff to re-examine the status quo and to consider how to provide better service for current and future users of the library, a benefit for both patrons and staff.

Another opportunity to consider how to respond to changing patron needs and how to remain relevant and vital to the community occurs from the recent creation of the library’s Futures Task Force. This task force is comprised of the director, two staff members, and six trustees, and is focused on examining current trends to determine what changes need to be made today to remain relevant in the future. A patron survey is currently being developed with the goal of gathering feedback directly from users, and the town-wide distribution of the survey will create an opportunity to not only gather responses but also to market library services to both users and non-users, thus increasing awareness of services offered.

### **Threats**

Competition to any public library can be other local libraries. As demonstrated in the Environmental Scan, one of the closest libraries (Weymouth) has better hours than the Hingham

Public Library. A large percentage of Hingham town residents use the Weymouth town library. While this percentage is small compared to how many Hingham town residents go to the Hingham town library, it is still something that Hingham should look into changing.

Since the budget for Hingham is larger than that of Weymouth, patrons may wonder why the library is open fewer hours. This could lead to proposed budget cuts or to an expansion of hours, which would call for a larger budget and possibly hiring of more staff. Funding may be an issue.

A growing dependence on technology and eBooks can make the library look like a ‘place’ and less like an institution. eBooks and the service to provide them costs more than physical items, so if the pendulum continues to swing in the technological direction fewer physical items will be able to be purchased. This may cause the collection to look aged, and once again this can lead to patrons wondering what the budget is used for. The other concern regarding technology should be the rate of technological advancement; falling behind is a constant worry of public libraries.

### **Conclusion**

The Hingham Public Library in Hingham, Massachusetts plays an active role in the community of Hingham for all its residents. The library is undergoing a period of change brought on by retirements and the generally fragile economic situation in which all publicly funded organizations currently find themselves. Our ‘literature review, environmental scan and SWOT analysis will help frame the next part of the strategic plan which the authors will detail in the second half of our analysis. Our team will also provide an annotated bibliography of best practices to help support the ongoing planning efforts required to keep the Hingham Public

Library a vibrant and relevant part of the community.

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