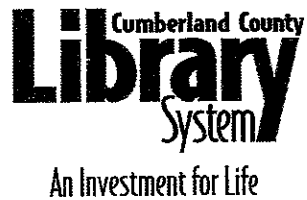


# **Libraries of the Future: Panel Discussion**

---



---

**Conference Center at Shippensburg University  
March 25, 2015  
7 to 9 PM**

---

**Report of Findings  
April 20, 2015**

---

## Libraries of the Future

Panel Discussion Report 3-25-15

---

### **Executive Summary:**

At the Conference Center at Shippensburg University on March 25, 2015, the Cumberland County Library System (CCLS) and Cumberland County Commissioners hosted the second of three community panels about library services in Cumberland County. The session's purpose was to understand the future of library services and libraries in a rapidly changing environment that is influenced by technology and changing consumer needs.

The session was well attended by about 80 members of the community. 22 attendees evaluated the panel discussion. The evaluations reflected a high degree of satisfaction with the event with scores of 4.52 out of 5.0 for the panel discussion. The facility was rated 4.19 out of 5.0 due to visibility issues to the panelists and the warmth of the room. Audience engagement was high with seven questions being submitted by audience members and each commissioner asking questions of the panelists. The specific questions and panelists' response can be viewed in the highlights outlined in the report below.

Prior to the panel discussion, Jonelle Darr, Executive Director CCLS, shared the challenges Cumberland County libraries have faced over the past 5 years:

1. Funding cuts over the past seven years have caused instability and have created an environment in which it is difficult to maintain service offerings, invest in new technologies and formats, or compensate staff at adequate levels.
2. Technology changes require simultaneous investment in both traditional print and expensive new digital formats to satisfy the community's needs. Technology also often requires a significant upfront capital investment before the library system can begin to reap long-term improvements or cost savings.
3. Staff compensation levels are low, yet high competency levels are required in both technology and customer service skills. Staff training is an ongoing need.
4. Partnerships and community outreach are absolutely essential to stretch the library system's resources and services even further. However, current staffing levels and the volume of work inside each facility limits much progress on this front.
5. Developing good evaluation tools (e.g. outcome vs. output measures) and having sufficient time available to analyze results in order to make plans for the future is a constant challenge.

Larry Thomas outlined key issues that confront the community and its leaders regarding the future of Cumberland County's library services:

1. Where should libraries expand, contract or possibly disengage its resources to create capacity for new services and information needs?

2. Should libraries set their own agenda for community service; or be collaborators with schools, government, private enterprise in setting a community agenda and division of labor? And what form might the latter take?
3. Should our libraries generally take the lead in addressing community needs; or should it look to create long-term partnerships with other community groups, even if it means taking a supportive role in some instances?
4. Are our libraries willing to surrender local autonomy to some degree to realize the benefits of a more centralized approach that takes advantage of economies of scale?
5. Should our libraries be looking at outcomes rather than outputs i.e., counting transactions, as a measure of its success?
6. Will our libraries be willing to invest in data collection and analysis to demonstrate they actually produce outcomes, rather than simply associating themselves with desirable outcomes?
7. Will our library system choose to move away from its current transactional based formula for distributing resources that in fact exacerbates the inequality within our own system, towards one that better aligns with an agenda to serve those without the means to access to the key services libraries can provide?

The panel discussion featured four national and local experts who shared a great deal of information regarding the past challenges and what the future may hold for libraries. The panelist were:

- Garry Golden – Library Futurist
- William D. Schell – President of York County Libraries
- Karen Archer Perry – Principal of Clarion Collaborative
- Amy K. Garmer – Director of Aspen Institute Dialogue on Public Libraries

The panelists were tasked with answering questions that provided the audience with first an understanding of the environment in which libraries are operating and the challenges they face and second a glimpse of the future and how libraries will/should evolve. The commissioners and audience members asked directed questions regarding how Cumberland County should look at the future, model best practices, prioritize and partner for future sustainability. Panelists observed that while there are some models of what other communities have implemented regarding services, collaborations and fundraising, our community needs to define our own model that meets our needs. Below highlight the discussion's key themes:

- The library is a **public place** and must evolve with community needs. Communities must make choices as to the services libraries provide.
- Increased **technology capacity and capability** is a reality for the future.

- Library as a **gathering place** will become even more important in the future as we are disconnecting in other ways. Having a place to go (i.e. buildings) will be important. They can evolve from the traditional view to shared community spaces.
- Library as a **learning place** beyond books is a reality as “lifelong learning” and e-earning are intricately connected to the library for all generations.
- **Collaboration and strategic partnerships** are a must for future sustainability.
- **Staffing effectively and ongoing training** of library staff is critical to keeping up with the needs of the community.
- Investments in **youth and early learning** will have huge payoffs in our community’s future.

In summary, the second panel discussion focused on what libraries need to do to maintain their relevance going forward and how to meet the challenges of rapidly changing information technology and user preferences. Key points included the continuing role of the library as a social place; the need for integrated, high capacity data networks; individuals’ lifelong learning needs; the importance of early learning; the need for strategic partnerships; and the need for constant library staff skill enhancement.

+++++

**Discussion Highlights:**

---

**Purpose of the Session:** To explore the future directions for libraries in the context of rapidly changing information technology and customer needs and to understand what our community should consider when envisioning a sustainable future for Cumberland County’s public libraries.

**Introduction:**

Jonelle Darr outlined five ongoing challenges that the library system faces:

1. Funding cuts over the past seven years have caused instability and have created an environment in which it is difficult to maintain service offerings, invest in new technologies and formats, and compensate staff at adequate levels.
2. Technology changes require simultaneous investment in both traditional print and expensive new digital formats to satisfy the community’s needs. Technology also often requires a significant upfront capital investment before the library system can begin to reap long-term improvements or cost savings.
3. Staff compensation levels are low, yet high competency levels are required in both technology and customer service skills. Staff training is an ongoing need.
4. Partnerships and community outreach are absolutely essential to stretch the library system’s resources and services even further. However, current staffing levels and the volume of work inside each facility limits much progress on this front.

5. Developing good evaluation tools (e.g. outcome vs. output measures) and having sufficient time available to analyze results in order to make plans for the future is a constant challenge.

Larry Thomas outlined key issues that confront the community and its leaders regarding the future of Cumberland County's library services:

1. Where should libraries expand, contract or possibly disengage its resources to create capacity for new services and information needs?
2. Should libraries set their own agenda for community service; or be collaborators with schools, government, private enterprise in setting a community agenda and division of labor? And what form might the latter take?
3. Should our libraries generally take the lead in addressing community needs; or should it look to create long term partnerships with other community groups, even if it means taking a supportive role in some instances?
4. Are our libraries willing to surrender local autonomy to some degree to realize the benefits of a more centralized approach that takes advantage of economies of scale?
5. Should our libraries be looking at outcomes rather than outputs i.e., counting transactions, as a measure of its success?
6. Will our libraries be willing to invest in data collection and analysis to demonstrate they actually produce outcomes, rather than simply associating themselves with desirable outcomes?
7. Will our library system choose to move away from its current transactional based formula for distributing resources that in fact exacerbates the inequality within our own system, towards one that better aligns with an agenda to serve those without the means to access to the key services libraries can provide?

#### Panelists:

- Garry Golden – Library Futurist
- William D. Schell – President of York County Libraries
- Karen Archer Perry – Principal of Clarion Collaborative
- Amy K. Garmer – Director of Aspen Institute Dialogue on Public Libraries

#### High Level Themes:

Panelists observed that while there are some models of what other communities have implemented regarding services, collaborations and fundraising, our community needs to define our own model that meets our needs. Below highlight the discussion's key themes:

- The library is a **public place** and must evolve with community needs. Communities must make choices as to the services libraries provide.
- Increased **technology capacity and capability** is a reality for the future.

- Library as a **gathering place** will become even more important in the future as we are disconnecting in other ways. Having a place to go (i.e. buildings) will be important. They can evolve from the traditional view to shared community spaces.
- Library as a **learning place** beyond books is a reality as “lifelong learning” and e-learning are intricately connected to the library for all generations.
- **Collaboration and strategic partnerships** are a must for future sustainability.
- **Staffing effectively and ongoing training** of library staff is critical to keeping up with the needs of the community.
- Investment in **youth and early learning** will have huge payoffs in our community’s future.

**Question 1: Will you please provide a brief summary of the major challenges and changes libraries have faced and comment on why these have occurred, how well libraries have met those challenges, and what issues remain?**

Using data gathered from the Pew Internet and American Life Project, Maryland’s Digital Inclusion Survey, the Aspen Institute and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Karen responded with four key points about the nation’s Knowledge Economy:

1. Libraries bring information and help build a communication technology infrastructure through the key pillars of:
  - Open innovation
  - Education
  - Knowledge management and
  - Creativity
2. Libraries are valued for many reasons – hubs for learning, education, and foundation of the community. Research shows libraries are:
  - Trusted Civic Institutions
  - Hubs for Knowledge and Learning
  - Technology connectors for people
  - Community Anchors
3. Future libraries will build upon strengths which will:
  - Turn Outward – supporting the community needs for the future
  - Connect and Convene as partners of the community
  - Engage Deeply
  - Enlist support of the community and other library systems
  - Provide knowledge support and learning – libraries will help people to discern value and create content
4. Future libraries will....
  - Actively engage more directly in community
  - Help people discern value and create content
  - Connect to networks
  - Focus on experiences instead of products
5. Libraries provide engaging spaces and community gathering points –
  - Libraries need to offer more intuitive services and seamless offerings on their websites

- Libraries should provide virtual connectivity for educational services, e-book downloads, and other support services
- Garry added and re-emphasized Karen’s point that libraries have successfully shifted from solely offering products to offering place-based experiences – one of the major success stories of libraries is that they are maintaining their relevance as a destination point. Not enough credit is given to how libraries are remaining relevant as a community destination.
- Amy noted that the meeting’s conversation had moved from Challenges to Choices to Opportunities. Libraries need to emphasize the key assets they bring to the community (people, place, platform), not the collection.

**Question 2: What challenges will libraries face in the next 5 – 10 years? Generally, how well equipped are they to meet them?**

- Garry – Libraries and the community should be looking at funding as an investment. After choices are made, focus on how to communicate that investment.
  - Funding for libraries is an investment with a clear return. The value of the investment needs to be articulated.
  - Major Trend: lifelong learning
  - Lifelong learning and personal data = libraries are going to be challenged at this intersection
  - Trend of mainstream phase – badges/micro-credentials – Said that 250 micro-credentials of skills and mindsets that we develop may enter the library sphere
  - Radical Theme: Lifelong learning driven by the emergence of “Intelligent Assistants” – current technology provides software that guides the learner in a pathway that is suited for them and the intelligence system guides them back, Today we see first wave of applications that use algorithms to drive decision making and guided services i.e. Turbo Tax
  - Trend: Personal Data – Personal Data is growing and changing how we generate insights, make decisions, and recommendations, i.e. social networking
- Bill commented on the challenges of the future by stating that we must make sure that the young generation is a part of the future and a part of libraries.
- Amy said that the world Garry was describing requires a different skill set that is already here in the library
  - We will need to retrain everyone because the current staff has a wide range of capabilities and skillsets that will benefit the community, we can continue to improve upon the current state of the library with the education that is needed to update the skills of the staff to meet the community’s needs.
  - Soft skills are also needed for this new environment – question posed to the library system – are you working with the employers of the community to get the skills up in library schools?
  - Young people should be driving people into the library and what they bring will change the future of the community

**Question 3: How should our libraries' focus evolve over time to remain relevant and sustainable? What have you seen other library systems do to maintain sustainability in light of the future changes on the horizon?**

- Bill - Collaborations, strategy partners, and asset builders – Libraries need to work together by sharing services like HR, legal counsel, strategic planning, facilities management, build trust and support, and to gain efficiency and productivity
  - Libraries need to act as strategic partners
  - Libraries need to build assets
  - Libraries must build an effective board of directors
- Amy – Collaboration starts with alignment with community goals. Sustainability by collaboration and strategic partnership
  - The alignment of the library with its programs and services should also be aligned needs of families and the education needs within the community.

**Question 4: How do we measure libraries' impact on target issues in order to ensure we are on the right track towards our vision for the future and justify ongoing support from our stakeholders?**

- Amy – This is a challenging area – the state of the art impact (or outcome) assessments of library services are in the early stages:
  - A Big shift is happening, we need to be evaluating what we are doing in libraries differently – rather than outputs, it should be more about outcomes
  - Currently, we don't have great metrics and measurements that can show the value of the library through outcome data.
  - We also need to align the data that is collected and get that out to the community effectively. We need to embed value assessments into our library programs to demonstrate how libraries work with school systems and the community, in order to measure the impact of the program
  - We need to take advantage of metrics that are being developed by the Public Library Association's Project Outcome Task Force and its Edge Technology benchmarks, the University of Washington's Impact Technology Survey, and the University of Maryland's Digital Inclusion survey.
- Karen – the measurement question is challenging but simple – it is the measurement of outputs vs. outcomes
  - Impacts are harder to measure because you need to know not just what was done but how that changes someone's life or choices.

**Final Question: Headline for the Future...“What will the headlines say about CCLS in the year 2020?”**

- Amy – Complete confidence the library will be around and doing positive things.
- Bill – “Donor Bequests \$20M to Celebrate Executive Director's Retirement”
- Garry – “CCLS Hires Chief Lifetime Learning Officer”
- Karen – “Cumberland County Leading Economic Power in PA – Libraries Blamed”



## **Commissioner and Audience Questions:**

**Jim Hertzler – What is the definition of “community”?** – Should we look at our community as a nation, our community as a state, as a county, or as a local township or boroughs, neighborhood. So, how do they define community for these purposes?

- Amy: Community is a group of people with shared interests that have committed to work together to address their shared interest and concerns with shared values – when you define community by a set of shared values and aspirations and commitment to improve lives and common problems is where the community begins.
- Bill: identity is a very big part of the community; community is a group of people with shared identity and purpose.
- Garry: Believes it has to do with locality and geographical position. Local is the community focus, and it's a local focus that is needed for success.
- Karen: libraries are local – the community is the people who are coming and aren't coming to the library.

**Barbara Cross: do you see the bricks and mortar into the future? Does it become a more abstract digital? How do you see the physical distribution of data? How do they see the physical structure of libraries in the future?**

- Garry: Foot traffic has only gone up.
  - Meeting spaces are needed, libraries need a physical footprint.
  - Bricks and mortar is not going away. Flexibility of space is key.
  - Meeting space could be revenue generating.
- Bill: very large population of invisible users / digital users. However, there is still a need for a physical gathering space.
- Amy: opportunity to take the library out into different bricks and mortar places in the community. It isn't about what exists now. There are ways to start co-locating libraries for sustainability and collaborating and partnering with programs and services that can be available in other spaces
- Karen: Pocket libraries in schools are a growing trend. Alternately, put pocket centers (such as health centers) in libraries. Libraries can offer overall common space without taking full responsibility for offering the services.

**Gary Eichelberger: Are there bell weather communities that we should be examining for best practices and models for library services of the future?**

- Amy – The Wyoming State Librarians says “if you've seen one library, you've seen one library,” meaning that libraries need align their goals with the community. This requires deep engagement. It requires a community-focused evaluation. To be successful, libraries need to listen and analyze carefully and then lead the parade. Be intentional, visible and bold.

**If we are to articulate the top 2-3 priorities of the community what are they?**

- Garry – Always focus on early childhood learning.
- Bill – We have to keep our early childhood learning focus. A study from the Benton Foundation found that children who were not exposed to books, reading and literacy in early childhood entered school with a 2,000 word vocabulary where as children who did have access to books, reading, and literacy activities during early childhood entered school with a 40,000 word vocabulary.
- Amy – Setting technology goals to maintain a high level of connectivity within the community is important – this can be the platform or gateway to government services, getting jobs, and access to technology – libraries can be a part of the solutions where the community provides opportunity.
- Karen – Creating learning spaces in libraries is important. She recommended reading the Institute of Museum and Library Services 5-Year Plan “A Nation of Learners” to evaluate the excellent ideas presented there.

**What are some of the most important returns on investment of positive outcomes that we can invest in for our libraries?**

- Karen – Social/local equity – the biggest return on investment is building human capital.
- Garry – People become inspired by their library experience to better their lives. Libraries serve as bridges in the community, helping to move peoples’ lives forward by having great educational experiences.
- Karen- Collaborative partnerships are very important. In Nashville TN the schools and public libraries have combined their library catalogs and the public libraries provide all the book processing and cataloging services. This is also being done as “Book Ops” at the New York Public Library and Brooklyn Public Library. In another place an industrial park and business incubator have collaborated with the public library system to provide Treehouse software – an expensive online learning software tool for software languages.
- Bill – Investments now in planting seeds for philanthropy will have long-term dividends.

**What are some examples of community partnerships in library systems?**

- Amy: Nashville TN – partner library and education – book services and circulation combination of resources have increased the knowledge and information that is available to bring together students and partners and the literacy resources available
- Karen: industrial park business incubator – made a contribution of the tree house software for libraries on computer languages for the business incubator and community
  - Not a good partnership if the library does all the work without incremental money
  - Need to provide training and support for the library staff
- Bill: York County – public safety partnership – police need to build relationships in the community – children’s library and the police come and play video games with them – great program and many children are involved