

Montgomery County Public Libraries

Where the County Reads, Where the County Meets, Where the County Learns

FY13 – FY16

Technology Plan through Projects

It is change, continuing change, inevitable change, that is the dominant factor in society today. No sensible decision can be made any longer without taking into account not only the world as it is, but the world as it will be. [Isaac Asimov](#)

Introduction

There are no scrolls in Montgomery County Public Libraries. There are no woodcuts. There are probably very few books even printed with movable type -- computers took over publishing long ago.

Yet the mission of libraries remains the same as it has through the ages -- to help people find information and other materials valuable to their lives. What has changed, and what will continue to change, is that libraries keep pace with the way in which customers find, and use, the materials important to them. Once upon a time, it was only in printed books. Now, books are being augmented in the rest of society by a digital revolution that combines words and images in devices that are gaining more acceptance each day.

Once upon a time, card catalogs were the way customers found what they were looking for in the collection. Now, models have shifted to hosting that information online. Customers no longer simply want to find books or other materials -- they want to share their thoughts on it with others, and keep lists of books or music or film for future reading, listening and watching. That is how the rest of society works; libraries have to keep up or risk being left behind.

Once upon a time, newspapers and magazines were the way customers found out what was going on in the rest of the world. Now, library Internet access is a crucial part of what is offered to the public, not only for research, but to help look for work, to start businesses, to learn new languages, etc.

The Montgomery County Public Library System has started that transition well.

The focus of Public Libraries is still books, but more and more time and resources are going into identifying, purchasing and providing digital information. The reference collection at Montgomery County Public Libraries (MCPL) is composed largely of online databases available to users 24/7. E-book circulation is showing double digit increases in the percentage of circulation.

MCPL is providing more electronic resources for research and e-books, and has responded to these changes by developing a presence on Facebook and Twitter. Information questions are answered via online chat as well as email. The Library's catalog is available via an application for iPhones and iPads.

Our computers also provide an assortment of software tools that many customers could not otherwise afford to buy for themselves. Library staff and user instruction sessions are available to help customers learn new hardware and software technology. In addition to computers, libraries have become a key source of Internet connectivity, providing users with great diversity of uses, including business, education, and socialization.

Surveys have shown that our customers are very satisfied with our libraries (96 percent satisfaction rate), but less so with some of the technology aspects, including the Library's website, and help in using technology. Those who completed the follow-up survey were very clear in their desire for two things --a mobile application for the Library's catalog and website, and more e-books. The great majority of those who asked the staff for assistance were satisfied, but there were a number of comments to the effect that branch staff was unable to help them with their technological problems, especially downloading e-books.

In this report, Montgomery County Public Libraries presents nine projects for your consideration for FY13-FY16.

The projects are:

- ^ Enhanced Catalog Application Project (eCAP)
- ^ Integrated Library System Evaluation Project (ILSEP)
- ^ Kiosk Library Projects: Beyond Library Walls (KLIP)
- ^ Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) Project
- ^ Restoring and Enhancing Vital Information Technology Assets in Libraries (REVITALize)
- ^ Revitalize Obsolete Customer Information Technology Tools (ROCKit)
- ^ Smart Room Technology (SmaRT)
- ^ Web Enhancement Project (WEP)
- ^ Digital Media Lab (DML)

These projects are designed to meet the demands of today while building for the technological demands of the future. They range from upgrades of basic infrastructure, to improvements in the catalog, to providing communities without full library services access to materials they need.

The projects are presented so that the need for each is outlined; the benefits of proceeding with each project is set out; and the costs are identifiable.

2013 - 2016 Technology Projects

A list of technology projects that would improve current library services or add new services was generated based on the results of exhaustive research, input from library and technology experts and library customer surveys. Included are the findings and recommendations from: two major Montgomery County Public Libraries' customer surveys; library staff; local and national stakeholders' opinions; recommendations from County Executive Leggett's "Summit on the Future of Libraries;" and a Summit and Futures Planning Committee, which included representatives from the Library Board and the Friends of the Library. The list was evaluated and prioritized by the Library Director's Advisory Committee and the Library Board. The results comprise the technology projects to implement during the next four years of the Library's Strategic Plan.

The Technology Projects for 2013-2016 meet some or all of the following criteria:

1. The project addresses a current need identified by Library stakeholders.
2. The project prepares the Library to meet an anticipated need, reflected by current technology and/or library use trends.
3. The project promises to increase efficiency and allow Library staff to focus on high-value public services.
4. The project provides a means by which the Library can support County and community initiatives.
5. The project receives strong support from Library customers and/or staff.
6. Technology projects suggested by Library staff during the 2011 Staff Development and Training Day: "One System Planning Ahead."

Some technology projects listed will be ongoing and will extend beyond the four-year plan.

Cost and time estimates for projects are included in the project descriptions. Where specific products are specified, they are intended as examples of a product that would fulfill the Library's need. Costs should be considered to be approximate.

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1. Enhanced Catalog Applications Project (eCAP)

The library catalog is the primary tool used by customers in identifying if the Library system has materials that meet their needs. It is a comprehensive listing of all library materials with information about their status, type, location and other relevant information. It is accessed via computers either in the library or remotely from any Internet-enabled computer or device.

Customer satisfaction surveys and staff input reports have documented overall dissatisfaction with the current catalog interface. The lack of enhanced search capabilities, customer personalization and customer content are cited by customers as barriers to connecting to MCPL's collections via the catalog. Customers have also conveyed that the current library catalog interface is far less functional than the search interfaces used to complete similar tasks in a retail setting (e.g. Amazon.com, Barnesandnoble.com).

Benefits

The catalog interface enhancements in this project will improve the effectiveness of the library catalog in meeting the needs of customers and connecting them to Library resources. Enhanced search capabilities will produce effective search results that are more relevant to the customers' needs. Customers expect to be able to sort search results by popularity and rating and to see search suggestions; they will have the ability to achieve this with new applications. These are all features that are ubiquitous in modern retail settings, and which aid customers in quickly making effective decisions.

The new applications will allow customers to add their comments about the Library's collections through social networking. Customers will also have the ability to save searches and booklists, share content with other customers and contribute content (book ratings, book reviews, booklists, and discussion forums).

eCAP will remove barriers to quickly and efficiently connect customers to the Library's collection and make the library a stronger physical and virtual extension of online social networks.

Estimated Cost and Staff Time

Cost estimates for the project range from \$25,000 to \$85,000 per year for the software needed to improve the catalog function. The project requires substantial staff time from those in Technology, Administration and Information services.

Selecting an appropriate technology is estimated to take an additional three to six months beyond current efforts. Implementing the project would take two to six months following a notice-to-proceed to an applicable vendor.

2. Integrated Library System Evaluation Project (ILSEP)

The Integrated Library System (ILS) is a major component of the customer services MCPL provides. It is the engine that powers the department's operating infrastructure. It allows customers to find materials, place holds on items, manage their accounts, check-out and renew materials, and receive status communications, among many other functions. It is the tool that allows library staff to inventory library materials, check-in/check-out materials, process and catalog materials, manage acquisition of new materials, manage hold requests, access critical statistical and operating reports, evaluate performance, make operational decisions, administer fees and fines, and other functions critical to daily library operations.

The current ILS is an upgraded version of the system in use by MCPL since 1999. The system received a hardware upgrade in 2006 and a major software version upgrade in 2010. While the system is currently functional, deficiencies or risks could arise because of the aging of the current infrastructure, or because of changes in customer demands, the library technology market or County technology changes. During the plan's term, the current hardware plant (now six years old) and contract (now twelve years old), will both reach the end of their feasible lifecycles.

Benefits

Due to the complex nature of the technology and its importance to all aspects of library services, MCPL must evaluate the condition of the system; identify any deficiencies, risks, or needs for improvement; and recommend the most appropriate actions, including modernization or possible total replacement. Benefits of the ILS evaluation include ensuring the best match between the changing needs of library customers and the current capabilities of the technology market. The evaluation process will include gathering feedback from both internal and external stakeholders, and will likely include assistance from a neutral facilitator.

A careful, structured review of the ILS during the planning period will ensure the existing system infrastructure remains stable and functional, and will be designed to provide feedback on potential future needs in a timely fashion. A modern library system, particularly one of MCPL's size and complexity, can only perform effectively with the use of a high-performance ILS.

Estimated Cost and Staff Time

The primary costs of ISLEP would be funds for facilitating the formal feedback of staff and customers concerning the functionality of the current system (\$5,000 - \$10,000) and possibly technical consulting on specific aspects of the system's performance or on developments in the relevant technology market (\$5,000 - \$10,000).

The project will take approximately a total of one work year. Key staff will spend time setting up evaluation parameters, processes, and implementing the evaluation.

The evaluation project should kick-off in early spring 2012 and conclude mid-fall 2012, in time to provide input on potential costs for the FY2014 Operating Budget submission process.

3. Kiosk Library Projects: Beyond Library Walls (KLiP)

Many residents of Montgomery County do not have easy access to library materials and services due to a number of reasons including: their library branch is undergoing renovations; they live in remote areas of the County without a library nearby; or, they live in an area of the County where a full-service library branch is not needed or feasible, but where a lesser level of library services would benefit the community.

Benefits

MCPL will offer customers services beyond the library's walls through kiosks. When a brick and mortar structure is not available to customers, a kiosk is the model MCPL will utilize to deliver books, materials and services. Kiosks are typically small structures with one or more open sides that are used to vend merchandise or services. Their use is widespread: retail malls, photo developing, healthcare, ticketing, travel and more. Kiosks are produced for minimal cost compared to the cost of a dedicated building. The kiosk can be a permanent structure or a temporary one. The kiosks provide a range of materials and services to customers including: current books for children and adults in a book vending machine, a drop-off for library materials, customer books/materials on hold in a materials locker system, and media (DVDs) in a media vending machine.

The Library's strategic view of the role of library kiosks in Montgomery County will allow customers from all areas of the County to connect to library collections and to consider the library an important virtual and physical resource for their information needs. Utilizing the KLiP model, MCPL will:

- Provide services to customers when branches are under renovation;
- Establish services in remote areas without library services;
- Locate services in busy, high-traffic retail areas;
- Locate services at Metro and bus stops;
- Place in locations where a new library may be built; and,
- Target areas where a full-service library branch is not needed or feasible, but where a lesser level of library services benefits the community.

MCPL has several branch renovations scheduled over the next five years, and temporary kiosks will be important assets during construction. A kiosk branch can provide services (books and materials) and access to virtual services for minimal cost compared to a dedicated library building. Kiosks benefit customers who cannot afford to travel to another library branch. Customers will be able to access library materials outside of library hours, and items can be returned conveniently without making a trip to a library further away. The placement of these kiosks in busy, high-traffic areas will also attract new library users and are a good marketing tool for many library services.

Estimated Cost and Staff Time

Kiosk estimates range from \$50,000 (for a limited provision of materials and a drop-off bin) to \$150,000 (for media, materials, and holds fulfillment) with carrying costs approximately 20-30% of acquisitions costs. Training on the use of kiosks will be required of Delivery and Collection Management staff. Staff time will include the selection of materials and the delivery and pick up of materials.

4. Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) Project

The Library needs better security and inventory control for library materials and a more reliable check-in and check-out system that also provides efficiencies for customers and staff. Securing over 2.5 million library materials, creating and managing the inventory, checking the materials out to customers, and checking them back into the library branch are core activities of library operations. Barcode systems are currently used by MCPL to perform these core functions, but are inefficient, outdated and do not perform with the accuracy and speed necessary for check-outs, materials security and inventory control. New technology that helps reduce staff workload while increasing productivity and improving efficiency is a cornerstone of the 21st century library.

Benefits

Radio Frequency Identification is a technology that uses radio waves to transfer data from an electronic tag (attached to an object) to a reader for the purpose of identifying and tracking the object. RFID tags can be used in many applications to track and manage inventory, assets, books and materials. It is a superior and more efficient way of securing library materials than the barcode systems that have been in place at MCPL since the 1970s. It can improve the reliability of check-in and check-out, reducing the number of inaccuracies on customer accounts. Improvements in read-range and speed have made RFID-enabled book drops a practical investment by automatically checking in materials immediately when a customer returns them and before more time is spent sorting them. With check-in and check-out processes more efficient, materials get into the hands of customers sooner.

Staff time will be more focused on customer needs rather than spent with check-ins, lost items, customer account inaccuracies, and tracking materials.

The RFID interaction with security systems and inventory systems will improve retention of the Library's investment in materials and will enable customers to find the materials they want.

Estimated Cost and Staff Time

Costs for the project vary by the proportion of the sites covered. Current costs would include the tagging of each item (costs for tags are approximately \$0.25 - \$0.75 per unit), applying tags, security gates (typically \$10,000 - \$100,000 invested per site, depending on the number of circulation workstations and entry/exit points), and "barcode conversion" devices. A whole-system implementation would range between \$1,000,000 and \$3,000,000 depending on the proportion of the collection tagged for both circulation/inventory and security purposes.

All circulation staff and selected information staff will be trained in the use of RFID technology and a project manager named from existing staff.

5. Restoring and Enhancing Vital Information Technology Assets in Libraries (REVITALize)

As the Library system continues its role as a community destination with a sense of “place,” the role of technology is vital for both customers and staff. New options for efficient service delivery and new service models based on technological developments must be implemented. MCPL must ensure the “place” customers choose to visit to read, meet and learn is equipped with the tools, techniques and technologies that are important to them. This infrastructure which serves millions of customers per year, thousands per day is composed of the computer network, business computing, point-of-sale, communications, and mobile services equipment used by Library system staff to support Customer Information Technology Tools and conduct daily business. As infrastructure ages, much staff productivity is lost to slower response times on computers, system crashes, and inefficient business processes as limited by the aging infrastructure. Customers are also impacted, both in the convenience of their daily transactions and in being able to effectively use the library infrastructure like WiFi networks to support their business, education, job search, and other important activities.

Benefits

The Library system needs a vital, up-to-date, highly functional information technology infrastructure to serve customers in an efficient and highly effective manner. REVITALize will increase staff efficiency, accuracy of financial transactions, and system effectiveness. It will make it easier for customers to pay fines and otherwise manage their accounts. It will enhance customers’ abilities to conduct e-Government transactions, search for jobs, complete educational requirements, learn new skills, and support their personal and business endeavors.

Estimated Cost and Staff Time

Estimates for some of the specific issues include:

1. Payment and account technology: Costs per branch would be a few thousand dollars (for credit card intake/cash register modification, and secure network installation) with potential additional “revenue costs” (credit card fees). It is possible, however, that such technology would boost revenues by making payments more convenient for customers.
2. Self-service infrastructure: Better self-checkout technology would cost approximately \$3,000 per existing machine (38) and \$10,000 - \$15,000 per new machine, plus increased operating costs for self-checkout machines that can accept credit card payments for library fines. Self-payment kiosks (where customers could pay for fines and for print/copy accounts with credit cards): One-time costs were estimated at \$150,000, with carrying costs in the range of \$50,000 - \$75,000 per year. A minimum of two work years total investment by at least four staff in Central Administration (two Business Office, two Technology Management/Operations), plus substantial training time and policy creation.
3. Network Infrastructure: A WiFi upgrade is estimated to cost \$20,000 - \$50,000. The lower cost point would upgrade only the access points, expanding the number of concurrent sessions and network speeds. Higher costs would be associated with a system that could more actively manage WiFi usage and provide diagnostic and management reports. Network upgrades (switches, new wiring at select locations) is estimated to be approximately \$100,000 - \$150,000.
4. Staff equipment and communications: In-building, staff-to-staff communications for larger buildings is estimated at \$25,000 per building. Other equipment, such as portable computers, would vary by the type of equipment selected and its deployment.

6. Revitalize Obsolete Customer Information Technology Tools (ROCKIT)

Today, Customer Information Technology Tools have become a major library service, and similar to library materials, the Library system must provide more relevant, functional and timely upgrading of these tools. National research has shown that these tools are especially important to customers impacted by the recent Great Recession, which a national survey by the Online Computer Library Center estimated to be 20% of the population. Library's Customer Satisfaction Survey results (2008, 2010 and 2011), customer correspondence, and staff feedback support these findings. Customer Information Technology Tools include public Internet access and library catalog computers, software, labs, and printing/copying devices. Customers use these tools to find jobs; build career skills, complete educational requirements; conduct e-Government business with other County departments and other government agencies; learn reading and math skills; do personal research to make important life decisions; interact with their community; and grow their small businesses; among many other diverse and vital activities.

A majority of the Customer Information Technology Tools in Libraries are now obsolete or insufficient to meet the full diversity of customer needs. When customers have to use obsolete tools, the documents they create or try to view on library computers are frequently incompatible, making them hard or impossible to use. The tools currently being used by the Library system evolved over a long period of time in the form of individual grant funded and County funded one-time initiatives. A long-term, permanent, and sufficient funding and operations infrastructure is needed to consistently keep all the tools in the best working order and at levels of capability appropriate to current customer needs.

Many public computers in the inventory are now approaching five years old, are under heavy use, and use an operating system that is three versions back from current technology. The office productivity software suite in use by the system is from 2002, several versions behind tools currently needed by customers and in use by most workplaces. MCPL must provide customers with more functional and relevant Customer Information Technology Tools. These tools must keep pace with current customer needs and must be maintained and upgraded in a proactive manner that will better meet future demands.

Benefits

Up-to-date and sufficient tools will enable MCPL to use current versions of Internet browsers, office productivity software, email, and other software needed by customers to effectively search for jobs, to complete school assignments, create resumes or other documents, locate and print Federal and County government information, and stay connected to their communities via technology. Using current versions of common business and educational software will make customers more competitive and effective in finding jobs, improving their careers, and educating themselves. ROCKIT solutions include:

1. Adequate access to state-of-the-art computers that are fast and effective, no more than three years old, and are consistently and conveniently available. This will be done in coordination with the Department of Technology Services.
2. Enhanced management systems for customer computing, Internet time, printing and other functions.
3. Adequate software for customer use.
4. Functional, efficient, and effective placement of these resources in library branches, labs, and mobile vehicle(s) to serve customers beyond library walls.

Estimated Cost and Staff Time

Rough estimates for some of the specific issues include:

1. Office productivity (\$125,000 - \$350,000): An assessment would be conducted of Cloud-based software versus the traditional owned per device model. Lower costs are for a Cloud-based model and the higher costs would be for traditional per computer purchase.
2. Lifecycle replacement of 500 public access computers on a three year cycle, versus a five-year cycle, would be approximately \$80,000 per year, assuming a computer cost of \$1,200 per unit.
3. Enhancement of customer printing/copying/scanning/faxing capacity: The current system only supports printing and copying. Upgrading to a more flexible infrastructure could cost an additional \$75,000 above current levels. The Library would spend approximately \$225,000 per year for infrastructure, but claim only \$150,000 in revenue from copy/print sales.
4. Expanding the types of software available on computers would vary by the software selected and the computers to be upgraded. If we increased the software investment by \$500 per computer, the approximate cost would be \$250,000 in initial investment.
5. Depending on the capabilities of the mobile lab, creating a mobile computer lab capability would range between \$50,000 and \$250,000.

7. Smart Room Technology Project [SmaRT]

The Library's 2008 and 2011 Customer Satisfaction Surveys suggested the Library provide the technology and equipment in library meeting rooms for videoconferencing, interactive learning experiences and multimedia presentations. Libraries are not only a destination for materials and books, but also a meeting place to create, share, and learn. Library meeting rooms are in great demand in Montgomery County, and with the appropriate technology, meeting rooms would have the ability to expand and be of greater use to more residents. At this time, the Library computer labs and community meeting rooms provide limited equipment for meeting applications.

Smart Rooms are specific rooms in buildings that are equipped with a full range of technological products that support instruction, lectures, demonstrations, and various types of programs.

Benefits

Input from the Library's Customer Satisfaction Surveys has indicated a need for Smart Room technology to widen the scope of possibilities for learning and entertainment in meeting rooms. Smart Room technology and videoconferencing equipment would support attendance at meetings with groups across the County, the state, and the nation; afford numerous civic engagement opportunities for residents; provide better accessibility to County public forums; reach wider audiences for training opportunities; and expand opportunities for cultural and educational experiences.

Libraries, as a meeting place for structured and informal gatherings, have been invaluable to customers' and communities' need for meeting spaces. A library meeting room with media and learning tools expands the use of meeting rooms and provides more opportunities for learning and enjoyment. A videoconferencing room in the library for use by the County would be an investment that could benefit many communities, business and educational groups who would want to host or attend professional conferences, provide lectures for wider audiences or attend a lecture given across the country.

Estimated Cost and Staff Time

Estimates for SmaRT range from \$5,000 to \$25,000 depending on how many components are added. Vendor assistance will be required.

8. Website Enhancement Project (WEP)

Library customers want the same services, and more than those delivered inside the library building, accessible to them via MCPL's 24/7 website. At over 5 million visits per year, Library's website is one of the most visited in the County. In order to serve the very diverse County audience, the Library's website must provide excellent navigation, well-designed categories of information, and be compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Improvements must be made to the overall look and feel of the Library website in order to maintain a consistent branding, improve navigation and usability, and support demand for on-going web innovation

Benefits

WEP will ensure a complete review and potential structural design change of MCPL's website in order to make it Section 508 (ADA) compatible. In addition, it will brand Library's core mission and services; provide information and reference services via online tools; and enhance social networking tools, the ability to embed tutorials, and ongoing customer feedback and evaluation of website and library resources.

Estimated Cost and Staff Time

The scope of this project will be more defined after the department completes the refresh website project under the management of the Department of Technology Services. The refresh website project will provide basic web architecture for Library's website. The completion of this phase is expected in spring 2012. MCPL has applied for a grant to hire a consultant who will then act as a guide in designing a website that is easy to navigate, maintains a consistent brand and supports the demands for ongoing web innovation.

Funds will also be needed for software licensing; hardware; and training to acquire skills in maintaining the website, creation of tutorials, publishing on YouTube, Facebook and other video-sharing sites.

9. Digital Media Lab (DML)

While literacy is still a vital role in the Library's mission, it is not enough simply to be literate. The American worker of the future must be technically literate and able to create content effectively with modern media technology. Library spaces have become increasingly important as gathering places where people meet to collaborate on shared school or community work, be a part of the community, learn independently, use social networking technology, express themselves, and access media technology tools that they could not otherwise afford to use in order to support these endeavors. Media Labs are relevant for all ages; this plan will focus on teenagers. The library has become a very important space for these tools for youth, and particularly at-risk youth. MCPL does not have a youth media lab, which is a key tool in supporting these emerging needs.

Benefits

Establishing Youth Media Labs will engage middle- and high-school aged youth in mentor-led, interest-based, collaborative learning using digital media tools such as video, photo, audio, and music equipment, coupled with computers, tripods, disk drives, and other computer equipment that support the creation of digital content. Youth will be exposed to a variety of digital technologies, which will help them develop critical thinking skills, creative expression abilities, and the ability to effectively use modern media equipment. This interactive space will support learning experiences which give teens an avenue to pursue their individual interests and have a forum to discuss issues of importance to their community. This project will facilitate partnerships with other County departments and agencies that are also serving youth with technology, and potentially with area non-profit groups and other organizations. The lab will support STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) and arts learning, and help to ensure that our young people attain critical thinking, problem solving, communication, and collaboration skills that they need to be competitive in tomorrow's workforce.

Estimated Cost and Staff Time

The department estimates that a single Youth Media Lab would cost between \$150,000 - \$200,000 in the first year, depending on the level of physical modification required to the space housing the lab. Costs are comprised of approximately \$50,000 in initial acquisition costs for computers, equipment, travel, research, and supplies and approximately \$102,000 in staffing costs for program management, planning, implementation, and conducting the lab program. Work effort is estimated at approximately 1.3 full-time equivalents per year. Staffing costs would continue annually, and operating costs would be less (about \$10,000 per year), with periodic re-investments in the core lab technology.

Conclusion

The Library system must operate both as a governmental department and a retail-style business. In addition to customer needs for technology in the provision of information services, library customers expect and demand that the Library system operate with the same level of efficiency, convenience, and effectiveness that they experience in the retail sector. This means modern payment technologies, self-service technologies, up-to-date web page technologies, efficient information searching technology, and convenient account management technology. The current library system technology infrastructure in this regard is very basic. This plan will move us in the right direction.