

CONTRA COSTA COUNTY LIBRARY Strategic Plan Progress Report: **RESPONDING WITH RESILIENCE** **Fall 2021**



Wildfire smoke permeates Contra Costa County.
San Pablo Library, September 9, 2020 | 11:00 a.m.

In 2019, 2020, and 2021, the Contra Costa County Library experienced unprecedented challenges.

🔥 Seasonal wildfires, PG&E planned outages, and extreme heat events, forcing library closures

💻 2020 ransomware attacks, requiring a total network rebuild

👤 2020 global pandemic which shut the doors at our 26 facilities

These upheavals have spurred us to reflect on our mission and goals. What does it mean to “Bring People and Ideas Together” when we are socially distanced and sheltering in place? What does it mean when people’s experience of these events are so far apart? How do we “bring together” when our established approach is suddenly insufficient?

Library professionals provide pathways to information, but as leaders and trusted facilitators in the communities we serve, we also offer spaces and supports for everyone to make meaning – to process the change and unrest happening on a global scale. In libraries, that happens through the stories we share. This is the Library’s story of resilience.

MISSION

Bringing people and ideas together

VISION

Contra Costa County Library is the pulse of our community. Working together, we spark imagination, fuel potential, and connect people with ideas and each other

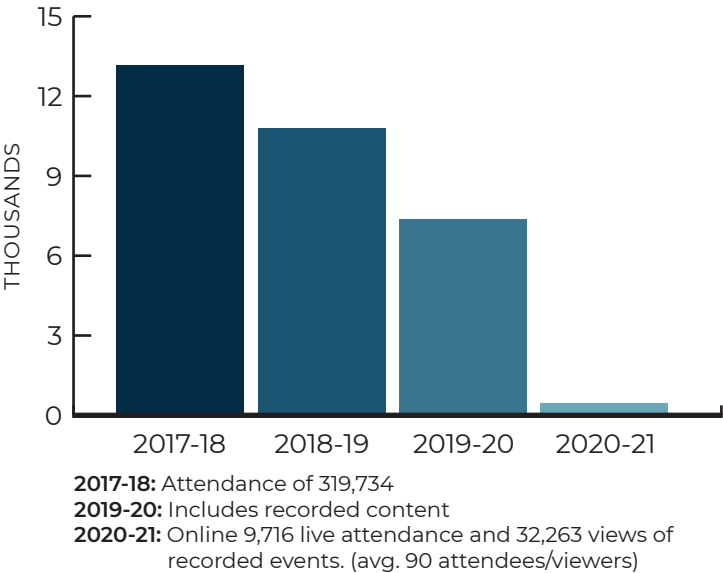
GOAL 1:

The library champions personal and community engagement in literacy and reading to enrich our lives.

Objective A – Increase opportunities for literacy, education, and lifelong learning by a minimum of 10 percent.

- ◆ Robust virtual programs for all ages and interests sustained our communities through the most isolating months of the pandemic. This pivot to online and recorded content expanded the reach of every program, tripling the average attendance/viewership over pre-pandemic participation.
- ◆ Online storytimes ensured the Library continues to support new families in fostering pre-literacy skills in children’s important first years.
- ◆ Staff expanded on fruitful partnerships to deliver popular content such as the Master Gardeners video series (with multiple episodes watched over 500 times.)
- ◆ “Take & Make Kits” were distributed at the front door to ensure hands-on learning continued to thrive, even while social distancing. For example, the Pleasant Hill Library distributed 1,000 STEM-based project kits to local families before a live virtual “Tinkers & Thinkers Innovation Faire” in September 2021.
- ◆ Implemented virtual tutoring services for the Project Second Chance adult literacy program.
- ◆ Expansion of our Library of Things promoted healthy and creative lifestyles including Outdoor Explorer backpacks, ukuleles, Stories to Go kits, C-pens and more.
- ◆ El Cerrito Library opened the Library’s first LGBTQ+ Special Collection funded by the DeLoach & Troy Trust.
- ◆ Expansion of digital learning resources for students and adult learners, including online assistance for job seekers, job search resources, and more than 220 newspapers like The New York Times, San Francisco Chronicle, and East Bay Times.

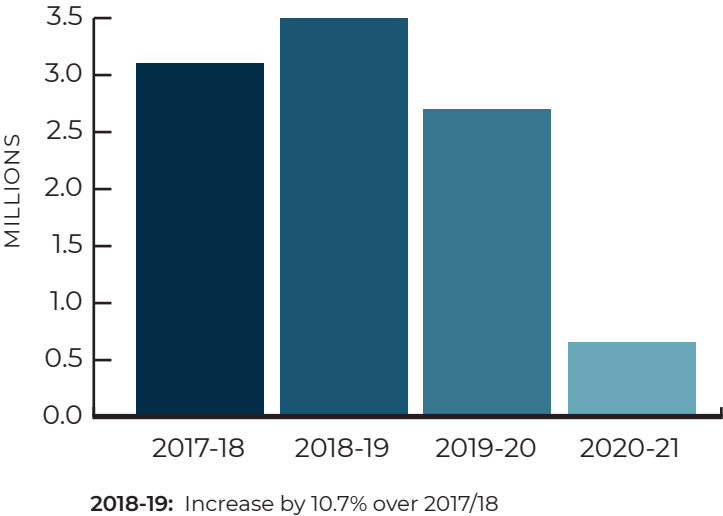
Objective A - PROGRAMS



Objective B – Increase library visits by 10 percent.

- ◆ In 2019, the Library exceeded its goal, increasing visits by 10.7 percent.
- ◆ The pandemic eliminated these gains in 2020, and staff responded with an entirely new “Front Door Service” model to meet the community’s needs. From June to December, staff checked out 776,775 items, satisfied 74,610 appointments (in addition to unscheduled walk-up visits), and prepared 19,101 grab bags of kids books for families.
- ◆ With most indoor services resumed by April 2021, visitation is recovering steadily.

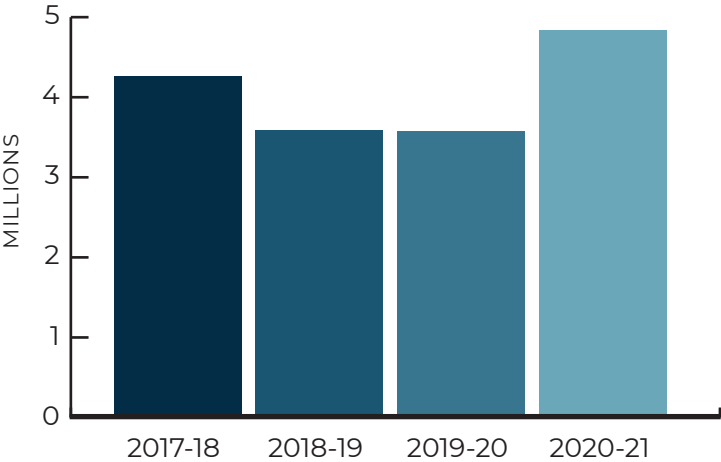
Objective B - LIBRARY VISITS



Objective C – Increase website visits by 10 percent.

- ◆ The Library smashed our record of online activity in 2021 with over 4.8 million visits. This traffic reflects the explosion of online offerings.
- ◆ Website traffic alone does not capture the fullness of digital engagement. The Library also monitors multiple social media platforms, YouTube views, and the Libby, Flipster, and Kanopy apps

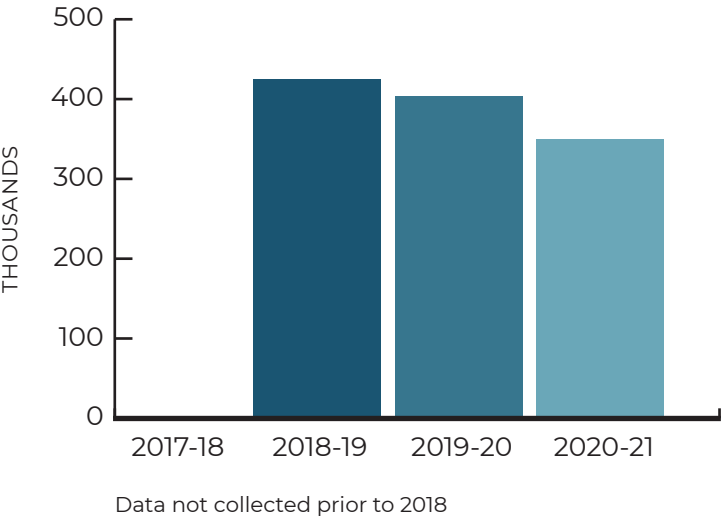
Objective C - WEBSITE VISITS



Objective D – Increase active users by 10 percent annually.

- ◆ The Library purged over 75,000 inactive and obsolete accounts in 2020 to establish a new accurate baseline for “active users”. Accounting for this statistical correction, real cardholdership is unchanged.

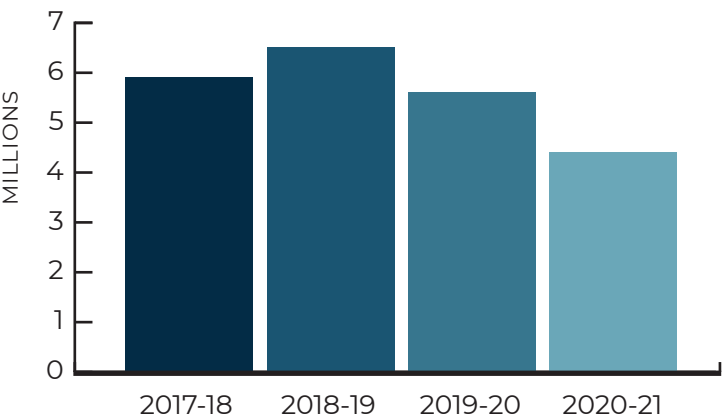
Objective D - ACTIVE USERS



Objective E – Increase circulation by 10 percent annually.

- ◆ In 2019 the library increased circulation by 9.96 percent as a result of the Reader’s Initiative and the elimination of fines.
- ◆ In 2020, with our doors shuttered, the library pivoted to meet a surging digital demand, investing 60 percent of the collections budget on electronic materials.
- ◆ After physical lending restarted in June 2020, digital usage continued to surpass print checkouts, topping a record-breaking 1.2 million eBook checkouts for the year. While print circulation continues to improve, the library has transitioned into a new era of eBook lending.
- ◆ Following the 2020 cyberattacks, the LINK+ interlibrary loan service was revived on an entirely new platform, recovering critical access to a statewide selection of materials.

Objective E - CIRCULATION



2018-19: Increase of 9.96% over 2017/18

“All three of our children learned the joy of reading and participated in the wonderful activities that you helped to develop. Our youngest son with special needs has now learned the alphabet letters and numbers through the fun books we routinely checked out through the library.”

- N.P., Kensington Library Patron



GOAL 2:

The library ensures easy, equitable access to library services for all Contra Costa County residents.

Objective A – Expand services to identified underserved populations a minimum of 10 percent.

- ◆ To address growing economic disparity, especially as it infringes on young people's library access, late fines were abolished, and all active overdue accounts were purged in 2019.
- ◆ Inequity along the digital divide has deepened in 2020-21. In response, the libraries ensured Wi-Fi was available from the parking lots, even when libraries were closed and began lending Wi-Fi hotspots.
- ◆ Free printing and scanning was instituted during Front Door Service
- ◆ Lunch at the Library and food box distribution
- ◆ Expansion of translation services
- ◆ Walnut Creek, Pleasant Hill, and Orinda libraries started contactless home delivery of library materials through partnerships with existing volunteer networks.
- ◆ With nonprofit White Pony Express, distributed hundreds of emergency care backpacks for people without housing.

Objective B – Optimize hours at the community level and other service points to increase usage by 10 percent.

- ◆ The library facilities were open for a total of 58,344 hours in 2019-20
- ◆ The pandemic's shock to the economy resulted in a loss of city partner support, slashing library open hours to 52,936 in 2020-21
- ◆ The library restructured operations during this downturn, consolidating to a Tuesday through Saturday open hours schedule to ensure consistency of staffing and service across all county libraries.

- ◆ City support has roared back along with an expansion to 40 "base hours" of service in July 2021. Libraries are projected to be open for 59,228 hours during this fiscal year, 15.5 more hours per week than before the pandemic.

Objective C – Enact initiatives to increase direct use of library services by non-active users by 10 percent.

- ◆ The Library simplified eCard registration, while expanding the power of the eCard for access to a greater variety of resources without setting foot inside.
- ◆ Through a new "Instant Digital Access" card, 10,295 new accounts were made for simplified, first-time access to the OverDrive eBook library.

"(During the pandemic), I made the decision to continue with my PSC classes on Zoom with my tutor Sandy, an excellent person and teacher who has helped me every step I have taken in my life related to my studies. Last year, I achieved one of my biggest goals; I got my GED."

- Mayra V., Project Second Chance adult learner

GOAL 3:

The library delivers a consistent, high-quality, and inviting experience at all points of contact.

Objective A – Enact barrier-free customer service to improve user satisfaction levels by 10 percent.

- ◆ The Library also started its journey to understand and address racial inequity. We are committed to doing the hard work of furthering the Library's goal of equitable access for all and in becoming an anti-racist institution. We launched a process of self-examination with Lori Watson, Ed.D of Race Work, LLC. With her guidance, all staff are involved in new, important discussions around equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI).
- ◆ Building on the success of fine-free service enacted in 2019, extraordinary accommodations were made to cardholders during Front Door Service, overriding account blocks and extending expiring accounts to ensure no one was barred from the library in 2020.

Objective B – Assess all facilities and develop methods to increase user satisfaction levels by 10 percent.

- ◆ Circulation per physical item jumped 29 percent from 2018 to 2019, averaging an extra checkout for every item in the entire collection. This represents an increase in visitor satisfaction with the browsing experience inside our facilities and the merchandising of our collections.
- ◆ In 2019, the Library began working with Margaret Sullivan Studio to evaluate facilities and foster "The Evocative Library" with more welcoming and engaging spaces.

"We got lunch and books, what could be better?"

- Concord Library
Lunch at the Library
participant



Objective C – Create a long-term vision for library facilities to serve evolving community needs and address equity of resources.

- ◆ Formed in 2019, the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) committee is charged with "looking at all aspects of library operations and services and making suggestions for improvements so that our organization, its services and collections are as inclusive and equitable as possible and accurately reflect the diversity of the population of Contra Costa County."
- ◆ Following the recent opening of new libraries in San Pablo, San Ramon, and Brentwood, we continue a trend of refreshing or rebuilding a new library nearly every year:
 - ◇ **El Sobrante Reopening** The El Sobrante Library reopened to the public on November 23, 2019 after sustaining major damage in a February 2018 fire. The completely remodeled library is ADA compliant and has new windows on all sides, six skylights that allow natural light into the building, a new meeting room, completely new collection, and all new computers.
 - ◇ **North Richmond Reading Room** The Early Literacy Reading Room at Shields Reid Community Center opened in February 2020.
 - ◇ **PSC office** In May 2020, the Project Second Chance central county office relocated to a dedicated space in downtown Concord.
 - ◇ **Pleasant Hill**
 - ▶ Staff redistributed collections and moved out of 1750 Oak Park Blvd. In July of 2020, historical collections were transferred to the Contra Costa County Historical Society for optimal long-term care and digitization.
 - ▶ In September 2020, the city broke ground on the new Pleasant Hill Library which is scheduled to be completed in the spring of 2022.

◇ Concord Refresh

- ▶ In Fall 2020, with support from the City of Concord, the branch underwent flooring replacement and exterior improvements, including removing the courtyard wall for better visibility from the street.

◇ Antioch Refresh

- ▶ In Spring 2021, interior improvements were completed throughout, including new paint, carpet, and shelving.

Objective D – Explore and implement technology to enhance the customer experience.

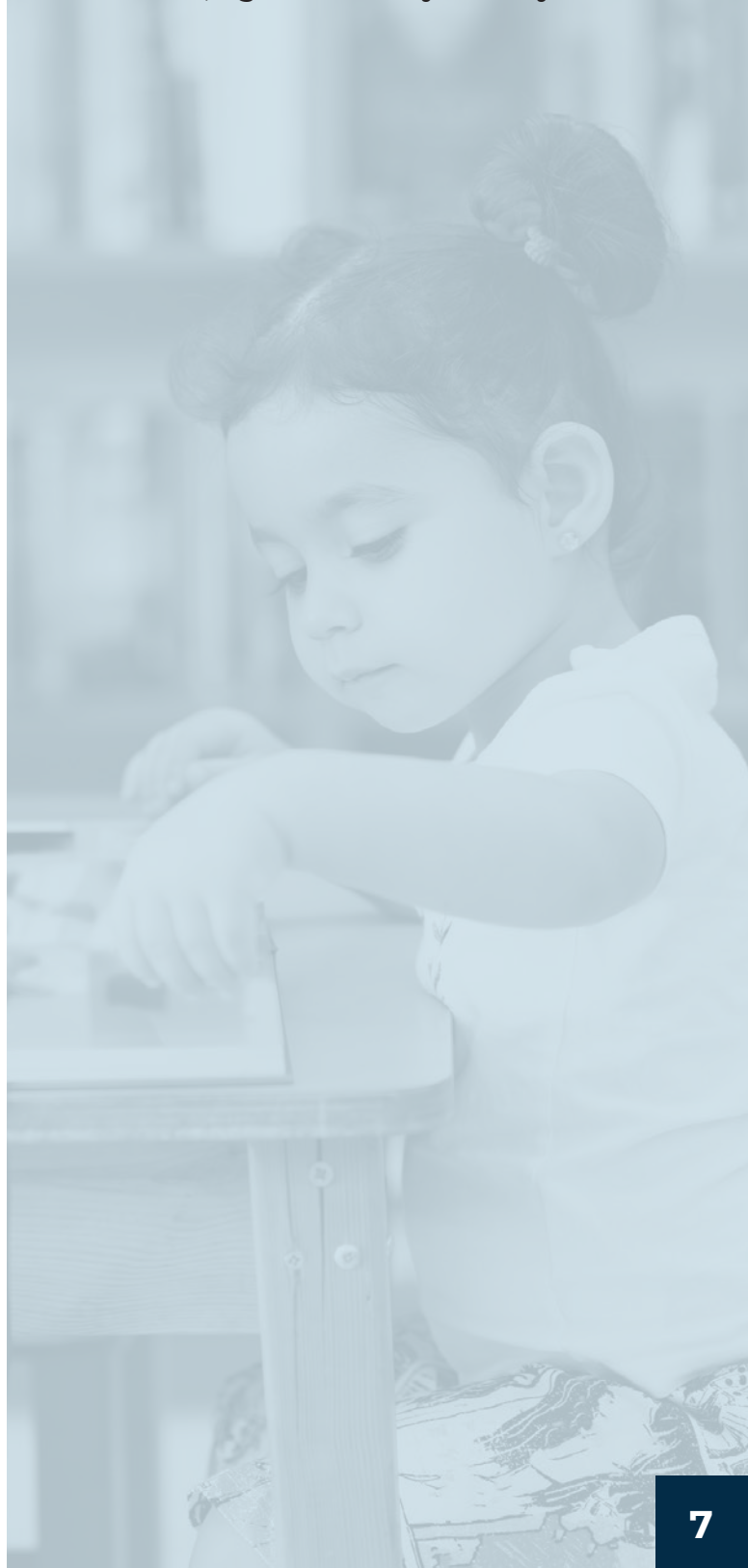
- ◆ 2019 - Introduced a new website featuring a new library catalog interface for easier search and discovery. Our new website offers a more stable and appealing site for book lists, reviews, blogs, event listings and account access.
- ◆ 2020 - Introduced free printing and scanning services and wireless printing.
- ◆ 2021 - 125 lendable portable Wi-Fi hotspots for customers.
- ◆ 2021 - 15 lendable Raspberry Pi kits for patrons to explore computer science.

Objective E – Establish standards of preparedness to respond to and recover from emergencies.

- ◆ June 2020 - Established Contra Costa County Library Pandemic Preparedness Plan, approved by County Board of Supervisors.

“To all you kind souls who make the Library run, THANK YOU!! You have adapted much and given much. The books I get allow me to calm my mind and emotionally recover so I can get on with this thing called life. Thank you for all the hidden ways you make that happen for countless people you serve and even the people who are touched by the people you serve.”

- Carrie, Ygnacio Valley Library Patron



Goal 4:
The library successfully promotes its value, programs, and opportunities to the community.

Objective A – Update the library-wide marketing communications plan.

- ◆ Set the foundation for updated communications plan:
 - ◇ Hired Media Production Specialist with focus on library promotion, creating more dynamic, conversation-starting digital content
 - ◇ Updated editorial guide and graphics manual
 - ◇ Created social media guidelines
 - ◇ Implemented new library website

Objective B – Implement county-wide marketing of library services.

- ◆ With “Goodbye to Fines” campaign, declared a new fine-free relationship with our communities
- ◆ Introduced five new library card designs, chosen through a public voting process
- ◆ Migrated newsletter onto OrangeBoy, which now goes out monthly to over 325,000 library cardholders and includes a message from the County Librarian
- ◆ Created new cardholder campaign on OrangeBoy
- ◆ Developed partnerships with the County Office of Education and other County departments such as Employment and Human Services, and Animal Services
- ◆ Improved new website
- ◆ Increased marketing in other languages
- ◆ Increased circulation of Library Lines column in East Bay Times from regional to countywide

“The first couple of months into the pandemic, the library continued to provide online resources which was a dealbreaker in keeping the panic at bay that was so constant at that time. How do I describe how much the library means to me?”

- Lauren, El Cerrito Library Patron



- ◆ In June 2020, we launched library blogs to highlight materials, programs, and resources relevant to current events, as well as to communicate the Library’s position as a place for equity, diversity, and inclusion to take root and flourish.

Objective C – Implement a staff-wide strategic marketing and communications plan.

- ◆ Twenty-five branches each curate at least one social media account, with countywide programs and re-broadcasted library news.

ISING TO THE MOMENT IN 2020

- ◆ 76 staff were deployed as Disaster Service Workers
- ◆ Two branches (Pinole and Ygnacio Valley) served as COVID-19 test sites
- ◆ Staff volunteered for weekly food distribution with West Contra Costa Unified School District
- ◆ The Urban Libraries Council recognized the Contra Costa County Library's 3D PPE Printing Program as an Honorable Mention in their 2020 Innovations Initiative. The Library was honored in the category of Wellness, Safety and Sustainability for 3D-printing mask clips and Montana Masks when PPE shortages threatened the pandemic response.
- ◆ Shipping staff collected and delivered essential PPE through donation drives at multiple locations across the county.

"Our libraries served our communities in so many ways during the pandemic, with a safe Front Door Service option, as COVID test sites, using 3D printers to create PPE, collecting donations, and with more than 70 staff members working in disaster service roles,"

- County Librarian Alison McKee

Conclusion

For society as a whole, the continual evolution of how information is published, shared, and consumed, has accelerated in this advancing digital age of rising inequality, polarizing "fake news", and a global pandemic. Meanwhile, our local communities seek to navigate a multitude of enduring and overlapping economic and environmental crises. The Contra Costa County Library is responding to these tectonic movements, acting boldly in the last three years to meet the shifting and growing needs of our users.

As we adapt our services, we also adapt how best to deliver them. Through this work of reimagining, we recommit to our core goal of championing personal and community engagement through literacy and reading. From overhauling online offerings to lending hotspots; from eliminating fines, to increasing hours countywide, the library continues to remove barriers and expand access. In these ways, we persevere to bring people and ideas together, the better to share one big story.

"Thank you so much for being open, we could not have made it through the pandemic without you!"

- M.H., Kensington Library patron