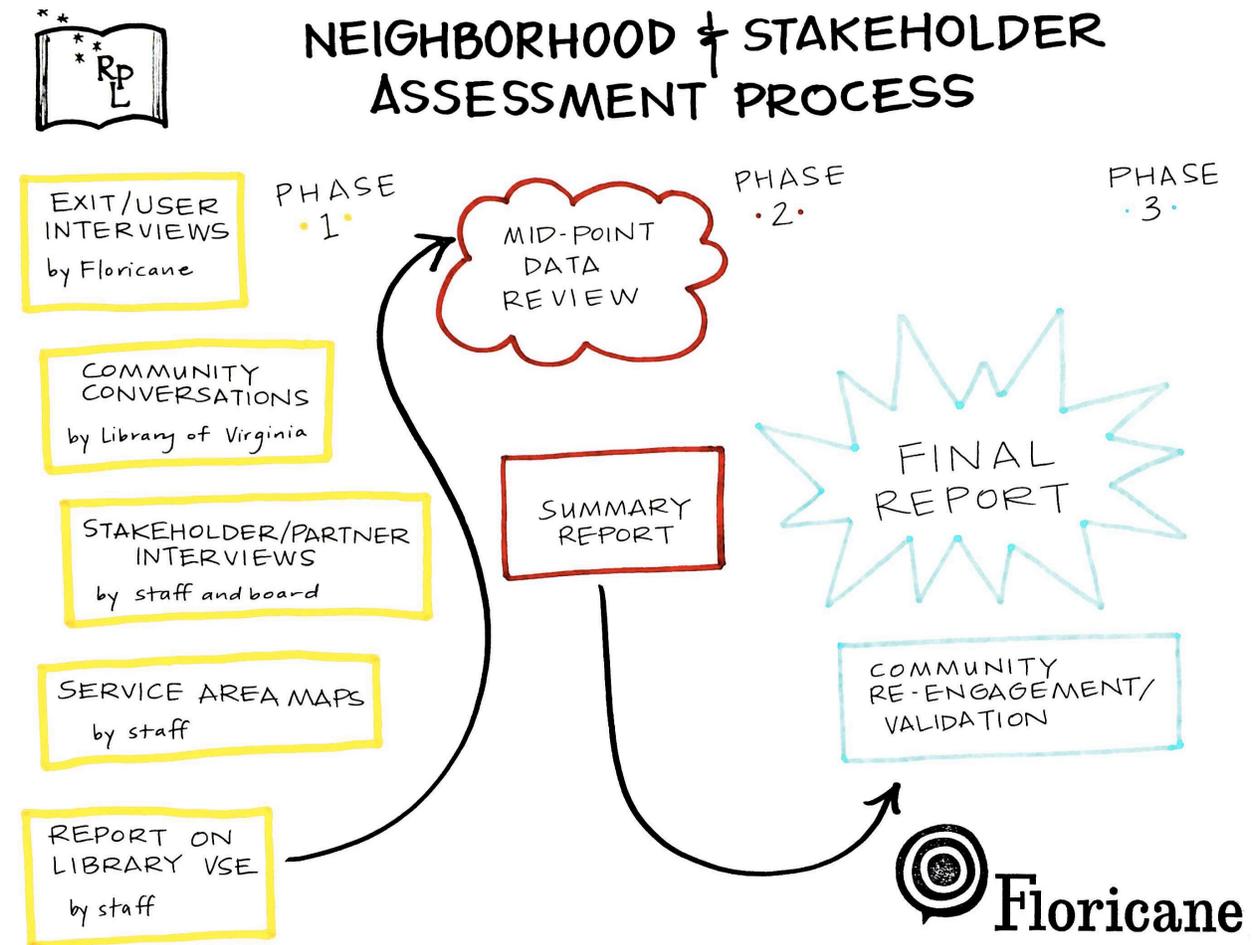# Richmond Public Library

Final Strategic Framework

Neighborhood and Stakeholder Assessment for Evaluating Future Public Library Needs

Report to the Board of Trustees
28 January, 2015

powered by Floricane

Introduction

Over an eight-month period, a number of affiliated initiatives were deployed by the Richmond Public Library system to assess the needs of the communities served by the system's nine branch libraries. Floricane, a Richmond-based consulting firm, was asked to review the output of several of these initiatives, and to conduct its own evaluation of public library services, partnerships and strategic opportunities. Our process – illustrated in the below graphic – culminated in a series of community conversations to re-engage library stakeholders and validate the outcomes of this work.

NEIGHBORHOOD & STAKEHOLDER ASSESSMENT PROCESS

PHASE ·1·   PHASE ·2·   PHASE ·3·

EXIT/USER INTERVIEWS
by Floricane

COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS
by Library of Virginia

STAKEHOLDER/PARTNER INTERVIEWS
by staff and board

SERVICE AREA MAPS
by staff

REPORT ON LIBRARY VSE
by staff

MID-POINT DATA REVIEW

SUMMARY REPORT

FINAL REPORT

COMMUNITY RE-ENGAGEMENT/ VALIDATION

Floricane

In addition to broadly summarizing the work conducted – by Floricane, and by other Library partners or employees – this framework document goes on to provide a set of strategic recommendations that should help inform the future work of the Board of Trustees and other governing organizations affiliated with the Richmond Public Library system.

Overview of the Process

The identified outcomes that the Floricane team was asked to deliver as part of our final report were:

- To identify public library services needed to fulfill the library's vision by specific areas served by individual branch libraries.
- To identify potential partners work cooperatively with RPL to fulfill the library's vision.
- To contribute information needed to update the library's strategic plan ad facilities strategic plan.
- To lead to more active engagement in the neighborhood by the library.

During the first phase of work – roughly March 2014 through September 2014 – a number of separate initiatives were triggered by the Library to gather data, including:

- A report on library use by branch
- A set of service area maps indicating both the geographic boundaries of each branch library, and the demographic characteristics of each community
- A small number of stakeholder and partner interviews, conducted by Library staff
- A series of Community Conversations facilitated by the Library of Virginia
- More than 500 patron surveys and interviews to assess the degree of satisfaction with current Library services at a branch level (conducted by Floricane)

Additionally, the Library participated in an Impact Technology Survey, which assessed how patrons accessed technology at the library and the value of that access to them.

We presented data from each of the initiatives described above to a mix of Library staff, Board of Trustees and Foundation Board members, and other community stakeholders during a half-day session at the Library of Virginia on July 23, 2014. Ideas generated from that session have been incorporated into this document, as well.

In September and October of 2014, an "Emerging Framework" document was presented to the Board of Trustees, the Library Foundation Board and the Library staff at separate meetings. Staff was asked to generate a range of ideas and suggestions within each strategic area, and to identify "low hanging fruit" at each branch library to strengthen community engagement. In addition to feedback gathered in these presentations, we received written feedback from:

- Peter Blake (Board of Trustees)
- Brenda Drew (Board of Trustees)
- Richard Dunn (Foundation Board)
- Danita Green (Board of Trustees)
- Kirsta Millar (Board of Trustees)

- Marshall Pearsall (Foundation Board)
- Katherine Tanner Pilcher (Foundation Board)
- Daisy Weaver (Board of Trustees)
- Russell Wyatt (Foundation Board)

Having incorporated feedback from board and staff, this document was presented to the Board of Trustees on October 22, 2014, for discussion.

The final steps of this process were a series of community conversations at each branch library to engage the public and key community stakeholders around specific community needs and opportunities in each of the strategic areas identified. An overview of those discussions can also be found in this document.

Strategic Observations and Recommendations

Richmond Public Library sits at an interesting crossroads.

As the nature of public libraries continues to shift – a shift accelerated by rapid technological, demographic, cultural and economic shifts buffeting every corner of American life – it is incumbent on individual library systems to find their own unique place within their community. In Richmond, Virginia, that place happens to exist very much at a neighborhood level.

With nine branch libraries – including the Main Library in downtown Richmond – the Richmond Public Library system has a local presence in each of the key neighborhoods that shape the social and political dynamic of Richmond. The branch libraries benefit from visible placement within each of the communities they serve. This local connection gives Richmond Public Libraries an interesting, and important, place from which to consider its future.

It is a future under pressure, admittedly. And not just from the macro forces identified above. The internal workings of the Library system create challenges.

The physical footprint of each branch library (the exception being the Main Library) is significantly smaller than its regional peers. The Library's place within the structure of Richmond's government is uniquely challenging – there is no clear advocate for public libraries in Richmond government. Five groups manage various administrative, financial and strategic duties for the Library (three boards, a series of neighborhood councils and Library administration) while a great deal of decision-making happens at the branch level.

At a time of change and transition, then, it is a remarkable testimony that the Richmond Public Library system continues to exceed the expectations of many of its patrons – and to provide services that matter to Richmond residents.

Much of this was affirmed by the surveys and conversations conducted with patrons and with Library staff. Patrons and staff collectively identified the Library's key strengths as being its neighborhood feel, the availability of technology and family programs, the service provided by staff, the Library's desire to move forward in new ways, and a "new energy" emerging in Richmond. Conversely, weaknesses were also clear – financial constraints, a lack of intergenerational programming, a silo/branch focus, a lack of public awareness and a lack of staff to support all nine locations.

Six key areas were surfaced through all of the data gathering and discussions as highly important areas of focus for the Richmond Public Library:

- *Staff*
- *PR and Marketing*
- *Partnerships*
- *Board Structure and Governance*
- *Stakeholder Advocacy*
- *Technology*

It has been noted that there is a degree of overlap between several areas – such as marketing, partnerships and outreach. We felt that each area was distinct enough to stand alone. Below, we provide a high-level summary of each area, a set of strategic recommendations and a list of additional ideas (generated by the boards and staff).

STAFF

Patrons value and appreciate branch staff. Moving into the future, Richmond Public Library should increase the time and attention it gives to cultivating a diverse, highly engaged and future-focused team of employees who are committed to providing consistently great service to patrons.

- The Library Director and HR professional should meet with the City of Richmond Human Resources Department to explore flexibility in the ways that the Library identifies, recruits and retains the best candidates for each position. Future hires should be passionate about the future of libraries within our community, and should reflect the diversity of our community.

- Branch managers should regularly network with other library systems – in the region and around the country – to identify best practices and new ideas that could be implemented in Richmond.

- The Library Director and HR professional should conduct an assessment of existing administrative/central staff roles/structures with an eye toward potential needs, particularly in the areas of marketing, programs, partnerships and technology. This assessment should also review, and make recommendations around, staffing at each branch library. Finally, the assessment should identify clear career paths within the system, and recommend creative approaches or less formal opportunities for staff to apply their skills, expertise and passion to advance the Mission of the Library.

- All Library employees should receive extensive orientation/onboarding training with an emphasis on the unique nature of each branch, the work of other departments, the Library's digital resources, the history and geography of Richmond.

- Ongoing training and professional development opportunities should be available to all Library employees with an emphasis on communication skills, advanced computer skills, the Library's digital resources.

- Ongoing management training should be provided to all supervisors.

- Explore ways to allow branch managers and other interested branch staff to work with colleagues at other branches (through cross-training, rotating coverage, etc.).

PR AND MARKETING

Despite the visible presence of branch libraries in key neighborhoods, the programs and services of Richmond Public Library remain invisible to too many Richmonders. An active public relations and marketing strategy should be initiated to make Richmond Public Library a destination of choice for Richmonders interested in learning, deepening their connection to their community, or accessing information about activities and services – at the library and throughout the city.

- Richmond Public Library needs a full-time marketing employee to develop a robust marketing strategy that strengthens existing print, electronic and social media communications. This role should also support individual branch libraries in their efforts to connect with their local communities and engage patrons.

- Increase the visibility of Richmond Public Library throughout the city and in the neighborhoods we serve with signage, flyers and other visual tools. The Library should be an active participant in neighborhood events (and in the parks and community centers), and very visible at signature Richmond events such as the Folk Festival.

- Increase formal and informal communications with staff about the work of the Library.

- Each branch library should have a strategy to be a more active participant in the community and to strengthen relationships with local groups – through community bulletin boards, food truck and farmer's market events, local merchant associations, participation in neighborhood events.

PARTNERSHIPS

While partnership opportunities are clearly limitless for Richmond Public Library, we believe the Library should develop a clear process to guide and manage its relationships with other organizations. Clear outcomes that support the Mission, a process to regularly evaluate and strengthen partnerships, and a mix of system-wide and branch level relationships need to be included. Ultimately, Richmond Public Library should cultivate a small number of significant relationships that add tangible value to patrons.

- Explore the feasibility of one employee who can oversee and manage system-level partnerships, and provide process support to branch managers to manage branch-level partnerships. Establish a clear process to initiate, evaluate and engage new partners regularly.

- Formally reach out to and connect with the new leadership at Richmond Public Schools to discuss specific strategies to more formally connect branch libraries to local schools; broaden the availability of and effectiveness of the Homework Help Centers; and to introduce city schoolchildren to their local library.

- Identify a small number of existing or potential partners at a system-level – such as Richmond Public Schools, GRTC, the Richmond Kickers or Washington Redskins, the Smart Beginnings early childhood education initiative, the local Workforce Development Board – and begin the difficult work of more effectively embedding these relationships throughout Richmond Public Library.

- Develop a process to identify and engage with corporate partners who can provide visibility and other resources to allow Richmond Public Library to grow its value to patrons.

- Encourage branch managers to identify and engage with 2-3 key local programming partners to help meet the needs to branch patrons, or groups of patrons.

- Explore establishing Library Advisory Councils at each branch that would be comprised of key community partners – parks and recreation, public school librarians and teachers, fire and police representatives, neighborhood association representatives and other neighborhood stakeholders. Clarify the role of the Advisory Councils to be focused on maintaining or strengthening the connection between each branch library and the communities they serve.

BOARD AND GOVERNANCE

Despite the risk of "too many cooks", we see the potential for tremendous benefit in maintaining four distinct governance groups that support Richmond Public Library. That said, it is essential that the Board of Trustees, Library Foundation, Friends of the Library and branch-level Advisory Councils are aligned with clear roles, functions and decision-making authority; have clear governance structures with good succession planning; and are well-oriented to and informed about Richmond Public Library and its work in the community.

- Establish a joint task force with representation from the Board of Trustees, the Library Foundation and Friends of the Library to:
    - Clearly define and articulate the purpose of each governance group, and establish clear expectations for board/council members (e.g., around advocacy, fundraising, etc.).
    - Review and revise current structure and by-laws to ensure clear alignment and decision-making authority across all governance groups.
    - Develop a long-term succession plan for all Boards and Advisory Councils to ensure all governance groups represent the diversity of our community.

- Explore establishing Library Advisory Councils at each branch that would be comprised of key community partners – parks and recreation, public school librarians and teachers, fire and police representatives, neighborhood association representatives and other neighborhood stakeholders. Clarify the role of the Advisory Councils to be focused on maintaining or strengthening the connection between each branch library and the communities they serve.

- Provide ongoing Board development and create a robust orientation program for all Boards and Advisory Councils.

- Create a process to increase appropriate interactions between board members and staff, and between each of the governance groups.

STAKEHOLDER ADVOCACY

As a result of its unique nature and reporting structure within city government, it is important that Richmond Public Library explore ways to be more visible and valuable to key decision makers in Richmond government. Building meaningful relationships with key policy makers, decision makers and influencers – at a citywide and neighborhood level – should be an active role for RPL and Branch leadership.

- Develop an engagement map to identify and connect with critical partners (i.e. city staff, city council, school board, local/neighborhood leaders, business community members) – and to clarify who in Richmond Public Library is responsible for which relationships.

- Create opportunities to bring critical partners into the Library on a more regular basis.

TECHNOLOGY

Ensuring that the technology available in each branch is current, functional and supported by staff requires both focus and dedicated resources. Going forward, the Library should provide current-edge technology tools and access to patrons; educate patrons/staff about technology resources; and stay current with new technology trends impacting the profession.

- Dedicate a full-time staff member to manage existing patron-facing technology, support social media outreach, coordinate staff technology training, and ensure that RPL stays current with new technology trends.

- Conduct a system-wide technology needs assessment, and develop a technology plan for 2020.

- Implement a staff/patron technology education/training program with a dedicated trainer.

BRANCH-BASED COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

Each branch library was asked to identify various stakeholders in the surrounding community who they would like to have present at a branch-specific Community Conversation to provide feedback and suggestions for improvement. While some conversations had more participants than others, everyone who attended and participated was engaged and enthusiastic about seeing the Richmond Public Library system better serve the Richmond community.

At each conversation, participants were asked the same question: "How can this branch be more relevant in the community?" While the answers to this question, and the ensuing dialogue, were diverse, there were some similar themes that emerged across all of the branches. Most notably:

- Increased communication and marketing across the RPL system to inform patrons of services and to promote programming
- The use of social media to reach current and potential patrons
- Greater engagement with local organizations (i.e. neighborhood associations, RPS, etc.)
- Education on the benefits of library membership and use
- Increased professional development and industry involvement for RPL staff

Belmont Branch Library
The Belmont Community Conversation had a strong focus on connections to local schools, awareness of programming, and a desire for "higher touch" service and experiences.

- Make the library a comfortable place for kids to explore and make their own selections
- Add to the already welcoming feel of the renovated library with a digital concierge, local coffee served on weekend mornings, an increased "retail" mentality on the part of staff, creating an energy that is welcoming and electric
- Explore partnerships with Museum District Association, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, the Carytown Merchants Association, the Byrd Theatre
- More book discussion groups and book clubs, theme/game nights (Clue with mystery books, Candy Land with desserts for kids, etc.), showing local films
- Helping patrons write their own stories

Broad Rock Branch Library
The Broad Rock Community Conversation had a strong focus on the relationship between the branch and the Richmond Public School system.

- Provide tours of the branch for parents after children tour the branch with their schools
- A quarterly staff exchange between RPS and the branch libraries
- Provide school librarians with information to distribute on how to get a RPL card
- The rules regarding use of the branch community room are too limiting; have to turn away a lot of potential users

East End Branch Library
The Community Conversation for the East End Branch library was attended by an energetic group of diverse stakeholders form the surrounding community who spent much of their time discussing potential partnerships and programming ideas.

- The Branch should serve as a hub for the community, and it has begun to become one. The relationships between staff and patrons have created a welcoming and comfortable environment.
- The Branch should showcase the surrounding neighborhood
- Place the branch on local tours
- Utilize the meeting room more effectively to host more programs
- Potential partnerships identified include:
  - School librarians
  - Parent-Teacher Associations
  - Local summer camps
  - Mentoring programs
  - Local restaurants
- Potential partnerships identified include:
  - Offsite library card registration (i.e. at the kindergarten registrations days at local elementary schools)
  - Presentations at PTA meetings
  - Family tours of the branch
  - Parent-Child reading programs
  - Field trips to the branch (i.e. meet and read with the Easter Bunny)
  - "Book Tastings"
  - Game Nights

Ginter Park Branch Library
The Community conversation at the Ginter Park Branch Library was well attended by an active and enthusiastic group whose primary concerns centered around the facility itself and the need for more physical space.

- Looks the same as it did 40+ years ago
- The building is not inviting
- Located on the City/County line, there is a desire to pull folks in from the county
- The children's librarian is a tremendous asset to the branch
- The branch serves as an equalizer for disparities that exist in the community
- There are concerns over the security of the branch – suggestions were made for better exterior lighting and cameras

North Avenue Branch Library
Another engaging conversation, participants at the North Avenue Branch focused much of their attention on ways to get more patrons to visit the library.

- Would like to see more community conversations held; either monthly or quarterly
- The branch should help to capture the community's story and tell it
- No room should go unused when the branch is open
- Create topic days (i.e. Health Day) and host programming with partners and providers in the community
- Create more themed spaces for children to interact (i.e. a lab, workshops, etc.)
- Provide exam prep programming, and study programming for local school-aged children
- Have the books being used by local schools on hand
- The branch staff passion and enthusiasm is great. "Keep it up!"

West End Branch Library
With an initial focus on the physical facility, the West End branch conversation also addressed the need for increased programming for underserved patron groups.

- The children's area should be more closed off to allow for more activity and noise
- The branch should be more visible – needs an exterior facelift
    o Parking signage needed
    o More windows and natural light
    o Better exterior lighting
    o The area is walkable, but the entrance is located in the back of the building

- There is a need for enhanced programming for seniors and young adults in the area
- The staff needs to be able to use and be comfortable with current resources
- Utilize the vacant lot adjacent to the branch for expansion or community space

Westover Hills Branch Library
While the Westover Hills Community conversation was small, it included engaged and passionate participants who focused on the relationship between the branch and the surrounding community.

- The branch should work to bring together the two dominant constituencies of the surrounding community – lower income citizens and middle class citizens
- The branch also needs to appeal to those in the community who have access to more resources and may not see the value of the branch
- Patrons need better education on resources and how to use them (i.e. Overdrive)
- The Branch should host more community events

APPENDIX: Staff Input (October 13)

What skills should every branch manager have? What should every new employee learn about Richmond and RPL in their first month at work? How can we retain great employees? What sort of training should all employees receive?
- Know how to communicate effectively with each staff member
- Ongoing training
- Value their position
- Branch managers and employees should have the ability and opportunity to work with colleagues from other branches
- Recruit more diverse people at all levels
- Communication
- Employee manual with everyone's name, photo branch and job title (on a shared drive)
- Employees should be more flexible. (Hire more flexible employees)
- All employees should receive some cross-training for all other positions.
- All employees should have training in, greater than or equal to, intermediate windows/office
- Computer training
- How to use computer, what other departments do and how this affects patrons
- Train good employees
- Recognizing good employees
- Develop plans to increase ownership of job involvement
- Keep employees engaged
- Ask questions about goals
- Find out what tasks they enjoy
- Competitive wage-salary
- Let staff know that they are appreciated
- Training with using library system (SIRSI) / Shelving, cash register, computer reference areas
- Visit each branch!
- Help employees identify and use their strengths to further RPL's mission
- Effective web searching
- All employees should receive training on the library's digital resources
- Ability to interact with community
- Open w/ patrons and employees
- Communication skills
- Experience in diverse employees and communicates
- Open mindedness and listen to patrons
- Be ready to get involved in community meetings
- Positive leadership
- Location and interests of each community organizations
- Branch managers should be able perform most duties at branch
- Every branch manager should be skilled at managing staff behavior/ performance issues
- Learn the history of area and the people
- Learn the city's strengths and weaknesses
- Staff should know a little about each RPL branch/ neighborhood
- Branch managers should be skilled at cultivating relationships w/ partners and stakeholders
- Branch manager should know how to delegate tasks
- Richmond's diverse history each neighborhood description, demographics, and location and history

What are the specific ways our branch advisory councils could support or branch libraries? What should the Friends of the Library do to support RPL?
- Monetary support
- Attend city council meetings and advocate for the library
- Converse with the actual staff members
- Advocate in the community

- Make sure City Council member have an RPL card!
- Get an advisory council at each branch
- Collection development aid from advisory groups
- Develop a common agenda
- Share community partners to build network
- Merge Friends and governance into one entity
- Be visible ** For all branches
- Engage staff, talk with staff
- Give larger % of book sale proceed to support programs
- Participation in library community programs
- Get connected with businesses
- Have Friends info @ each branch and work with the advisory groups
- Introduce ourselves to each other

What technology tools do our patrons need from us? What else should RPL do to stay current w/ technology advances?
- Staffing and Training!
- Fulltime webmaster/social media specialist
- Updated operating system...NO XP!
- Mobile technology lab... IEE
- Improve website usability /functionality
- Printing from mobile devices
- Wireless printing
- Faxing from Xerox machines
- Better promotion of library technology classes/ workshops
- Digital Media/ Workforce Development Lab
- Scanners
- Streaming Classes/ Webinars Bi-lingual
- Providing different tech devices, especially Macs, Nooks, tablets
- Scanners/ credit card payments
- More new computers
- RPL Kiosks/ Satellites
- E-Fax Services
- Staff training on technology
- Upgraded filtering software
- Better website
- Better website/ Computer Lab for staff
- One staff person to travel to all the branches and teach computer classes
- Display monitors for all locations

What would make us the "go-to resource" about what's going on in our neighborhoods?
- We need to be visible to become the go-to source
- Community connectors who know what we do and what we have
- Convenience
- Be present and participate in community events

Where should RPL be visible in our community?
- All daycares
- Pre-k programs
- Schools
- Where parents are
- Museums. Parks.
- Community bulletin board

- Bus LED display and vocal display
- Something to distribute to merchants etc.
- Festivals—A booth @ every festival and sporting events
- Apps and social media where they are
- Must gather community info an then find a way to display it.
- Liquor stores, corner stores nursing homes, schools, churches, housing project YM & YWCA, Boys and Girls Club.

Currently, who are our best community and business partners? What makes them the best? Who should we partner with going forward, and why?
- Richmond Squirrels
- Dominion, Target, DTLR, Verizon
- Churches
- Science Museum, Children's Museum, VMFA
- LGBTQ Community Center
- Social Services/ Recycle
- FeedMore
- Other Colleges
- Workforce Development
- ECDI, Excel, VA REP, Schools, Media specialist
- Work more with other libraries, Henrico, Chesterfield, Hanover
- Parks and Recreation
- Arts Groups and Galleries
- VACU
- Churches, fraternities, sororities, Parks and Recreation, Health Department
- Each other
- District Community meetings
- Schools RPS
- Police
- City Departments
- Community Association
- Office of multi-cultural affairs
- Hispanic merchants/ Latino market
- Daycares
- AARP