

Section 5: Library Standards & Best Practices

The Request for Proposal (RFP) required the Consultants to review current best practices in library service, facilities, staffing, programming, technology, and fiscal sustainability relative to the Santa Fe Public Library (SFPL) system, with a focus on those that have the most relevance for SFPL.

This portion of the scope of the 21st Century Library Master Plan included analyzing guidelines and benchmarks for effective library service and technology, based upon Library industry standards and practices that are applicable to the SFPL system.

The contents of this Section document the process, findings, and conclusions of that effort. Findings included a survey of current Public Library Standards adopted by states other than New Mexico, and were similarly organized, in anticipation of New Mexico potentially adopting of statewide public library standards in the future.

Library Standards & Best Practices

Based upon years of experience in library planning, the Consultants have developed a list of characteristics we believe determines if an existing library is capable of housing and delivering 21st century library services.

Planning Standards. The Consultants submitted library planning guidelines to SFPL, outlining definitions of terms, facility planning standards, library-specific space standards, parking guidelines, and suite evaluation criteria. Also submitted and applicable to the project are public library trends and best practices.

National Public Library Standards & Best Practices

There are no codified national standards for the design and operation of public libraries. Therefore, the Consultants developed standards over several years, and continue to refine them periodically, as warranted. Industry-wide, statistics collected by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (ILMS) and categorized into *Library Journal's* Star Library Index are recognized as highlighting best practice metrics.

The Star Library Index. In 2010, *Library Journal (LJ)* publications proposed a public library ranking system to enable constructive comparison of, and advocacy efforts for, public libraries in the US. To this day, the intent of the *LJ* Index of Public Library Service is to help improve the pool of nationally collected library statistics, and to encourage library self-evaluation, using service output measures.

LJ Index scores and Star ratings are based on data reported annually by public libraries to their state library agencies and compiled nationally by the IMLS. Public Libraries are grouped by like levels of expenditures per capita, as a way of equitable comparisons. Within each expenditure peer group *LJ* identifies the top 30 scores. They give the top ten scores a 5-star rating, the next ten scores a 4-star rating, and the remaining ten scores a 3-star rating – hence the moniker “Star Library.” Index scores are based on five per capita service output statistics:

- Library visits;
- Circulation;
- Program attendance;
- Public internet computer use; and
- Circulation of electronic materials.

The nine groupings of annual expenditures are range, from the lowest at \$10,000 to \$49,999, to highest at over \$30 million. Santa Fe Public Library, with recent annual expenditures of approximately \$3.6 million, falls squarely in the \$1 to \$5 million tier. The top ten scores in each expenditure tier receive a 5-star rating, the next ten scores a 4-star rating, and the remaining ten scores a 3-star rating. So libraries compete against each other, not a prescribed benchmark for each metric.

The statistical design of the Index is re-analyzed and reviewed at regular intervals. A qualification statement published by *Library Journal* states:

“By definition, service outputs do not reflect quality, excellence, effectiveness, or value of services to the library’s community. National-level data required to measure these aspects of library performance, even in a limited fashion, do not exist. Similarly, the index does not indicate whether library service output levels are appropriate for the library’s community, nor the extent to which services sufficiently address community needs. We encourage libraries to analyze their own operational and community demographic data locally in order to address these two vital assessment issues.”

For the record, New Mexico had five Star Libraries in the 2018 index. Santa Fe was not one of them. Four of the five were under 3,000 population, all five were under 5,000.

Modern Library Building Standards. Some State Library Facility Standards are considered industry-wide standards, and some are proprietary to the Consultants. Based upon years of experience in library planning, the Consultants have developed a list of characteristics we believe determines if an existing library is capable of housing and delivering 21st century library services. The Consultants believe there are several factors that need to be present in any public library facility for it to be judged a modern library:

1. Adequate overall size of facilities;
2. User-friendly housing of collections;
3. Proper ratio of seating quantities to collection quantities;
4. Significant and current technology for public and staff;
5. Age-specific spaces and furniture for all ages;
6. An assortment of public meeting and gathering spaces, in numbers and sizes;
7. Adequate size and equipping of staff work space; and
8. Adaptable building infrastructure.

In the Appendices, we include standards of relevance applied to SFPL facilities over the course of developing the Comprehensive Master Plan.

Library Building Design Guidelines. The assessments of current library facilities, and the cost estimates for new modern library buildings, were developed using guidelines considered to support best library practices and sustainable architecture. These guidelines form the baseline against which the existing Main Library and Branch Libraries were assessed, as these guidelines approximate the scale of those buildings and their infrastructure systems.

See Appendix 5.1 for a definition of library facility-related terms that are used throughout the documentation of this Comprehensive Master Plan.

Library Design & Space Planning Standards. Based upon years of experience in library planning, programming, designing, furnishing, and constructing, the Consultants have developed a set of space planning standards that result in a modern library facility that is TAS (ADA)-compliant, user-friendly, and can be designed and built to be operated economically.

See Appendices 5.2 and 5.3, respectively, for library building design standards and the net square feet (NSF) required to adequately accommodate each item, occupant, activity, and/or task in a modern public library building.

Library Site Selection Criteria. The Consultants have developed a set of assessment criteria for the land upon which each library facility sits. Any new parcel of land identified as a potential library site should be selected based on a list of criteria that reinforces the goals of the City and SFPL. It is critical to approach the site selection process for a new public library with care. The ultimate success of any new library facility will be largely determined by where it is located. Acquiring anything less than a good site will prove a false economy in terms of the life-cycle costs of the facility. The wrong site can significantly hinder public use of this important community resource. The following eight criteria are proposed for use in ranking competing sites:

1. Site capacity, now & future;
2. Legal matters;
3. Development cost;
4. Physiography;
5. Accessibility;
6. Visibility by passersby;
7. Building “fit” into the fabric of the community; and
8. Views from the site, distant & close.

See Appendix 5.4 for a prioritized description of these eight site selection criteria.

Library Parking Criteria. The Consultants have also developed a set of criteria for the amount of parking required to support a given public library, proportional to its square footage. With most public libraries, adequate off-street parking – accessible and convenient to the entrance of the library building – is a principal factor in user satisfaction – as well as the amount of use a library will receive.

Without adequate parking, there is every reason to anticipate usage of the library

will not reach its full potential – true of both Main and Branch Libraries. When addressing parking, the Consultants recommend considering:

- **Landscaping.** A 21st century parking lot must take steps to reduce heat gain generated by the mass of concrete paving. There should be trees throughout the lot, with access to water, per forestry guidelines;
- **Walkways.** Solid surface walkways must safely lead all persons to the entrance(s) of the building, in compliance with ADA;
- **Lighting.** A potential increase in hours of operation will result in additional use of the Libraries earlier in the morning and/or later in the evening, thus requiring adequate lighting. Anti-light pollution concepts like “dark skies” should be adopted and implemented; and
- **Signage.** Signage should be highly visible, tasteful, and well-positioned to adjacent street(s), identifying parking for handicapped spaces.

See Appendix 5.5 for the quantities of spaces and characteristics of parking required for Central (Main) and Branch Libraries for SFPL.

Standards for Public Libraries

In the absence of codified public library standards in New Mexico, the Consultants recommend using standards adopted by the State of Colorado in 2016, as modified for New Mexico for the purposes of this Library Plan. The Colorado Public Library Standards (CPLS) are sanctioned by the Colorado State Library (CSL), a state governmental agency that provides informational, library, archival, and records management services to a wide variety of individuals and organizations. The intent of these most recent Colorado Standards is to be a living, working document that continually evolves ‘to mirror the vitality of good public library service’ while improving public libraries everywhere.

Levels of Library Service. CPLS recognizes two service levels – Basic and Future-Focused. The Future-Focused level builds upon the Basic.

Planning Standards & Evaluation Criteria for the Project

In line with Colorado requirements and industry best practices, the Consultants adapted the CPLS as the structure for assessing all aspects of the SFPL System. Specifically, the headings from CPLS were modified to organize and account for the breadth of public library operations in Santa Fe, and are presented on the following pages in this order:

- Services & Programming;
- Collections/Resource Sharing;
- Technology;
- Facilities;
- Human Resources (Personnel & Staffing);
- Marketing & Advocacy/Community Engagement;
- Finance; and
- Governance/Planning (Administration).

Evaluation. As an aid in planning for evaluating individual public libraries and/or library systems, the CPLS provides checklists of the Basic level of standards. These checklists are extensive and are included in this Library Plan, under each of the eight headings above. They provide a concise overview, allowing libraries to appraise their status. For use with this Plan, the Basic level standards are presented at the beginning of each of the corresponding eight sub-sections. Specific quantifiable metrics are included for each sub-section, as applicable to the given subject matter, comparing current SFPL achievements with best practices, Basic (50th percentile), and Future (75th percentile) standards.

For future planning purposes, the Consultants list comparative metrics for two population groups – under 100,000 and 100,000 and up – as the City of Santa Fe population is currently under 100,000, but is projected to grow to over 100,000. Important to note is that the Santa Fe Service Area Population used for calculating metrics related to the Standards assessments in this Library Plan is not the figure reported by Santa Fe Public Library to New Mexico State Library in SFPL’s 2017 and 2018 Annual Reports (the reported population is the 2010 Census figure, as required by the State Library), but rather was the more accurate figure of current estimated population by the US Census Bureau.

In summary, we have assessed standards compliance for each of the eight categories bulleted above, and SFPL achieves at least the Basic level in most cases. Specific deficiencies are documented in more detail in Section 7, under sub-sections devoted to the eight categories.

