MENLO PARK LIBRARY
STRATEGIC PLAN 2016-2020
Our Mission
The Menlo Park Library is our city’s focal point for information, learning, and culture. We enrich people’s lives through our collections, programs, and expertise.

OUR VISION FOR THE 21ST CENTURY
The Menlo Park Library is the community’s focal point for information, learning, and culture. The Library is equally accessible to people of all interests and ages as they develop and apply new knowledge.

We serve at the heart of every home, providing community gathering places that are resourced to meet the information, reading, learning, literacy and special needs of our community.

We build a community of readers and learners. Our programs and services are available within the library and throughout our city: in homes, markets, cafes, workplaces, and digital platforms.

We are the recognized community resource for lifelong learning. We create physical, personal, and digital space to help people connect as they meet their information and learning needs.

We are a dedicated team of staff, Commissioners, Foundation members, Friends of the Library, and volunteers. We work together to provide a vast array of library services, resources, and expertise.

We collaborate with other city departments, with neighboring libraries, and with the broader community, including schools, businesses, and non-profits. Together with our partners, we enrich people’s lives.

We foster a knowledgeable and skillful citizenry who engage in matters important to the Menlo Park community and to the broader world. Our work contributes to a healthy, democratic society.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the fall of 2015, the Menlo Park Library sought consulting assistance from Jennifer Sweeney, MSLS, PhD and Ray Patchett, MSOD to facilitate the development of a comprehensive strategic plan for the coming five years.

The consultants worked with Director of Library Services, Susan Holmer and the Strategic Planning Team through a process that included workshops and interviews to clarify mission, vision, and values; community forums to solicit ideas about the future; a survey of community members on library service and resource needs; analysis of library performance data and community statistics; and a strengths–weaknesses—opportunities – threats (SWOT) analysis. Using the information discovered during these activities, the consultants and the Strategic Planning Team then developed the library’s strategic directions, broad overarching aspirations, and SMART goals, practical initiatives to deliver on the library’s mission and vision.

Several key issues informed the context of the planning process. Public libraries in the digital age are operating in an environment where knowledge and creativity drive productivity and economic growth. Information, technology, and learning are central to a community’s prosperity. Libraries have traditionally been the community center for expanding access to information, educational opportunities, and social connections. The challenge now for the Menlo Park Library is to reshape library services with new thinking and bold action to meet the new learning and information needs of today’s digital age communities.

Finally, the landscape of the City of Menlo Park overall, and the Belle Haven neighborhood in particular, is changing rapidly. The influx of new technology firms such as Facebook and others is altering city demographics and economic characteristics in dramatic ways.

The overall strategic directions for the Menlo Park Library are as follows:

• Provide state-of-the-art library space
• Increase community engagement through strategic partnerships
• Increase library programming
• Strengthen staff competencies
• Identify and meet changing library service needs
• Communicate and market the library’s story
BUILDING ON STRENGTHS

Our study found that the Menlo Park Library does many things very well. The library provides dedicated, knowledgeable, and motivated staff who bring a strong service ethic to their work. Staff members put a high priority on meeting user information needs quickly and competently. The community appreciates the quality of the collections, services, and programs. Program attendance is strong.

This is important because the Menlo Park demographic is highly literate and residents value reading and learning. The library is considered an educational cornerstone and community hub.

In terms of technology, the library provides fast, state-of-the-art wireless connectivity, with superior bandwidth to support technology access and use. Use of electronic services and collections such as e-books is popular and growing.

Not surprisingly, given the library’s positive status in the community, the library benefits from a strong support network. Friends of the Menlo Park Library volunteers provide countless hours managing the Friends Bookstore and sales, sponsoring events, and supporting library programs. The Library Foundation raises significant funds from individuals, local businesses, and other foundations to supplement library resources to enhance facilities and services. The Library Commission maintains a strong presence with the City Council and makes recommendations to them for library programs and services. Project Read is the library’s adult literacy program which provides free adult literacy education and ESL classes to enable adults to improve their English language skills.

Despite these strengths, today’s rapidly changing information environment has changed public perceptions of libraries. People now tend to turn to online sources first for their information needs, and they do not necessarily arrive at their information destination via the traditional library building. The library’s relevance in this digital age has shifted: libraries are not just about books anymore. Communities continue to need information—whatever the format—and the library can and should continue to meet those educational and learning needs in any format, with tailored services and programming, technical assistance, and more.

Our study found that the Menlo Park Library and its stakeholders are eager to meet these challenges: by becoming a hub for the community; strengthening its human capital; as a welcoming space for reading, learning, and communicating; and by becoming a platform providing tools and resources for the community to learn, discover, and create, individually and collaboratively.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

Throughout the planning process, the Strategic Planning Team communicated findings of activities to library staff for comments and feedback, resulting in the following strategic directions.

1. State of the Art Library Space

Concern for improving library spaces was noted in a 2014 Organizational and Administrative Review of the library, and echoed frequently in the workshops, forums, and surveys. In the main library, users have outgrown the reading and meeting spaces needed to support individual and collaborative
activities. The downstairs meeting space does not provide enough room for popular children’s and adult programs, nor for the new types of programming users are requesting. The library needs to provide modern and useful spaces for entrepreneurs, students, families, and lifelong learners.

Staff space is limited in both the main and Belle Haven libraries, which make it difficult for staff to effectively complete their work. The Belle Haven branch itself is underutilized, in part because it is located in the Belle Haven Elementary School, where many potential users do not realize it is a branch of the Menlo Park Library. Ongoing growth in the number of housing units and continued business development in the Belle Haven neighborhood is widening this user population-library services disconnect.

Finally, workshop, forum, and survey participants provided many suggestions for space improvements, such as adding small and large group rooms for collaborative work, a café, demonstration/meditation gardens, and other indoor and outdoor spaces. A facility and space needs assessment will provide the groundwork for addressing these upgrades.

2. Increase Community Engagement Through Strategic Partnerships & Programming

We observed strong interest across all the planning activities in developing the library’s role as a community hub, a place where all sectors of the community can come together to work and play. Menlo Park residents and library stakeholders regard the library as one of the few places (and perhaps the only place) in the community where education and life-long learning is offered to everyone regardless of age, income, ethnicity, or other demographic.

Forum and workshop participants noted that the library would benefit from reaching out to the well-resourced and engaged Menlo Park community in a number of new ways. The library should expand programming through partnerships with community organizations, especially businesses and the technology sector, as well as nonprofits and the faith community to enhance access to information and learning. The growth of the Belle Haven neighborhood represents a clear opportunity to serve changing user needs. In our survey, library users requested many new programming options, and the library will make use of the synergies created by partnerships to draw more people to the library.

3. Increase Library Programming

Menlo Park Library users rate the quality and content of current programming very highly across the board, and the children’s programs in particular are very well attended. Survey respondents and community forum participants indicated strong interest in developing programming based on educational lectures, book clubs and author talks, science programming, and technology learning.

4. Strengthen Staff Skills and Competencies

The current staffing model relies heavily on part-time and volunteer workers—much more so than its benchmark partner libraries—in part because of constrained resources but also because of the difficulty of recruiting qualified professional staff to Silicon Valley with its high cost of living. In order to provide state-of-the-art, 21st century library service, staff need to stay abreast of continually changing technologies, services, and resources. A detailed staff development plan is needed to address these
issues. The library will also work to systematically acquire knowledge of best practices from other libraries, and incorporate these regularly into library policies and procedures.

5. Identify & Meet Changing Library Service Needs
Throughout the workshops, forums, and surveys, we observed multiple calls for increasing services, developing new programs, and creating innovative ways to meet user needs in the community, particularly by making use of technology and virtual services. Users are interested in seeing the library expand its traditional role (i.e., providing physical books) to include “new ways of being a library”—such as taking services out into the community, both online and physically, in offsite pop-up locations, and by making use of new technologies for service delivery.

The library should also prioritize access to technology as well as developing expertise to deliver new virtual services. Upgraded technology and improved website information and usability will enhance the library’s ability to meet user needs effectively. A systematic evaluation plan will help sustain positive program and service growth.

6. Communicate and Market the Library’s Story
Participants across the planning process emphasized the need to strengthen the public’s perception of the library. The library must present a truly compelling message to constituents. This can be achieved by developing a robust marketing and outreach plan to raise awareness. This strategic direction supports and is supported by its companion strategic directions: better communication will foster new partnerships in the community and generate support for new programming, improve political awareness and funding viability within City government, and broaden the public’s perception of the extraordinary potential of the library to engage, illuminate, and educate.

Strategic planning participants recognized the urgent need for the library to raise its public visibility by communicating the breadth of existing and potential programs and services. Stronger marketing and outreach programs will not only raise awareness of library services, but will help cultivate communication between the library and users to discover emerging information and service needs.

ACHIEVING THE DREAM

Using the framework outlined in the Strategic Directions, Library staff drew on input from the surveys, interviews, community forums, and workshops to determine the following specific, measurable, achievable, results-oriented, and time-bound goals. Over the next five years, the Menlo Park Library will take action to make progress in these six Strategic Directions. Each Strategic Direction includes a number of more specific goals. While initial planning start dates are indicated, which are frontloaded to the first three years of the plan, it is expected that implementation of these goals will last through 2020.

1. State of the Art Library Space
   • Goal 1.1—Work with the Engineering Department and consulting firm to complete library space needs analysis
• Goal 1.2—Coordinate efforts of library support organizations to develop a plan to secure funding for building renovation or construction of a new state of the art main library based upon the results of the space needs analysis

• Goal 1.3—Conduct a library service needs assessment for the Belle Haven neighborhood and determine service and facility needs for the Belle Haven Branch Library

• Goal 1.4—Add electrical outlets to library patio to expand usability of the space

• Goal 1.5—Add exterior seating to library entrance area and work with designers on landscape renovation

2. Community Engagement

• Goal 2.1—Explore and pursue partnerships with the local business community and develop a variety of informative programs
  2.1.1—Make contact with the Chamber of Commerce and the City Business Development Manager to identify potential partnerships
  2.1.2—Design and present five initial programs on relevant business topics in the next year
  2.1.3—Analyze the success of the programs and use the data to develop ongoing programs if warranted

• Goal 2.2—Enhance partnerships with and outreach to local schools
  2.2.1—Sponsor three workshops per academic year teaching students how to effectively navigate and evaluate information
  2.2.2—Establish relationship with Menlo Atherton High School Administration to explore and define mutual goals
  2.2.3—Develop a library internship program in coalition with Menlo Atherton High School

• Goal 2.3—Establish a City jump team to address local transient issues

• Goal 2.4—Collaborate with the Community Services Department to direct the new Programming Specialist to develop programs and events that meet each department’s distinct service goals

• Goal 2.5—Build a coalition of the library’s support organizations for better communication and the development of mutual goals

• Goal 2.6—Implement a program of non-place-based learning opportunities that reaches into the community to organizations like Little House, the Senior Center and other nontraditional library service locations

3. Programming

• Goal 3.1—Increase the number of programs at both library facilities by 10% to 20% over fiscal year 2016-2017; assess the success of the programs and adjust increase based upon results.
  3.1.1—Create a series of tutorials using a variety of media to teach patrons how to effectively use library resources
  3.1.2—Create and document a plan to increase science programs by 10% for the pre-Kindergarten, Kindergarten-5th Grade, and middle school age groups
  3.1.3—Develop and implement a program to increase adult programming by 20%
  3.1.4—Plan and implement an effective and community-focused non-traditional teen services program

4. Staff

• Goal 4.1—Develop a professional development and training plan for staff based on necessary competencies and skills
  4.1.1 Create a staff competency and skill requirement list
  4.1.2 Develop a program to increase staff exposure to best practices for libraries and implement those can be replicated for the benefit of Menlo Park Library
  4.1.3 Require key staff to visit two other libraries per year and identify at least one procedure to implement

• Goal 4.2—Create a dynamic staff bulletin board (online & physical) to harness staff ideas and energy

“The top priority should be developing and reinforcing the library’s role as community educator and community forum”

—Community forum participant
5. New Service Needs

• Goal 5.1—Develop the vehicle that will provide the best feedback from library users and non-users
  5.1.1—Conduct online and in-person surveys annually which target specific as well as general library topics
  5.1.2—Use non-place-based service locations to solicit input from non-users
• Goal 5.2—Develop, analyze, and utilize monthly metrics on library services
  5.2.1—Share them with library staff
  5.2.2—Share them with library supporters, city leadership, and the public
• Goal 5.3—Develop, implement, and regularly review a library policy and procedure manual that communicates library policies and adjusts to changing library services
• Goal 5.4—Assess library collections using products like Collection HQ and adjust resource allocation to reflect changing needs

6. Communication

• Goal 6.1—Establish a Communications Committee focused on marketing the library’s value and accomplishments
  6.1.1—Market and reach out about library programs and services via social media with no fewer than four posts per week
  6.1.2—Use printer receipts, library TV monitors, and other tangible resources to promote library activities and services
  6.1.3—Coordinate library marketing plan with other City departments to reach a broader audience

EVALUATION SCORECARD

The Library Mission and Vision are by nature aspirational, but acting on the framework set out through the SMARTGoals is the ongoing, living achievement of the strategic plan. This plan provides space for regular accountability using a scorecard to track what has been achieved and what remains to be done.

Ongoing strategic management contemplates an annual review to celebrate goals achieved, update existing goals, and add new goals that support delivering on the Community’s and the Library’s vision of the future.

The complete set of SMARTGoals with scorecard is provided in Appendix D.

SMART-goal (smart’ gol). n.

1. A result or objective that we are committing to achieve;

2. SMARTGoals are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Results-oriented, and Time bound.
### Timeline

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<th>2016</th>
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<th>2018</th>
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<td><strong>December</strong></td>
<td><strong>January</strong></td>
<td><strong>January</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>2.5 Build coalition of support organizations</td>
<td>1.1 Complete library space analysis</td>
<td>3.1.2 Plan to increase science programming</td>
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<td>2.6 Implement non-place-based programming</td>
<td>2.2.2 Establish relationship with MAHS</td>
<td>3.1.3 Increase adult programming by 20% and evaluate</td>
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<td>4.2 Create staff bulletin board</td>
<td>5.2 Develop &amp; use monthly service metrics for library staff</td>
<td>4.1.2 Research and implement best practices</td>
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<td>5.2 Develop &amp; use monthly service metrics for library staff</td>
<td>6.1 Establish communications committee</td>
<td>4.1.3 Visit libraries for best practices</td>
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<td>6.1 Establish communications committee</td>
<td>6.1.1 Promote library services with tangible media</td>
<td>5.1.2 Collect input in non-place based locations</td>
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<td>6.1.1 Promote library services with tangible media</td>
<td><strong>February</strong></td>
<td><strong>March</strong></td>
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<td>6.1.2 Use social media to promote library</td>
<td>5.1.1 Conduct patron surveys</td>
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<td><strong>May</strong></td>
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<td>2.2.1 Sponsor information literacy workshops for students</td>
<td>3.1.4 Implement non-traditional teen services program</td>
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<td><strong>June</strong></td>
<td>5.4 Assess resource allocation for library collections</td>
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<td>2.3 Establish team to address local transient issues</td>
<td><strong>July</strong></td>
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<td>4.1.1 Create list of staff competencies</td>
<td>1.2 Develop funding plan for library renovation/construction</td>
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<td>5.2.1 Develop &amp; use monthly service metrics for supporter and city staff</td>
<td>1.3 Analyze Belle Haven library service needs</td>
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<td><strong>July</strong></td>
<td>3.1 Assess programs and increase programs</td>
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<td>2.4 Develop programs with CSD</td>
<td><strong>September</strong></td>
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<td>6.1.3 Coordinate marketing plan with City</td>
<td><strong>October</strong></td>
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<td><strong>September</strong></td>
<td>1.4 Install outlets on patio</td>
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<td>2.1.1 Identify business partnerships</td>
<td><strong>December</strong></td>
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<td>2.1.2 Present programs on relevant business topics</td>
<td>1.5 Landscape renovation work</td>
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<td>2.2.3 Develop MAHS library internship program</td>
<td>2.1.3 Evaluate business programs</td>
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ABOUT THE LIBRARY

Established in 1916, the Menlo Park Library is a municipal library operated as a department of the City of Menlo Park. The Library is currently housed in two locations, a 34,000 square foot main library building in the Civic Center area near downtown Menlo Park, and the Belle Haven branch library, a 3,800 square foot facility located within the Belle Haven Elementary School. The current main library building was constructed in 1957, renovated in 1968, and expanded and renovated again in 1992.

Serving a population of approximately 33,309, MPL has 23,652 registered borrowers (FY 2014/15), a total circulation of 677,846 and 355,967 library visits, and an FY 2015/16 operating budget of $2.9 million.

Library organization

The library workforce currently consists of 19 permanent staff members (14 FTE), of which seven are full-time, and 36 temporary part-time staff members. Two of the permanent full-time staff members split their time between two separate departments (Adult Services/Library Administration and Circulation/Belle Haven), while the remaining five full-time workers spend 100% of their time assigned to a single department (Library Administration, Youth Services, Circulation, Belle Haven, Adult Literacy). Volunteers also add their valuable talent to the library workforce.

The library benefits from a strong support network, including a Library Commission, Library Foundation, Friends of the Library, and Literacy Partners. The Library Commission maintains a strong presence with the City Council and communicates with the Council regarding library programs and services. The Library Foundation raises significant funds from individuals, local businesses, and other foundations to supplement library resources to enhance facilities and services. Friends of the Menlo Park Library is a volunteer organization of local residents dedicated to enhancing the library, its resources, and the services it provides to the community. The Friends group manages the Friends Bookstore in the library lobby, and sponsors various book sale events. Literacy Partners is dedicated to helping support Project Read, the library’s adult literacy program.

Library Organizational Structure

![Library Organizational Structure Diagram]
Context for the planning process
Public libraries today in the digital age are operating in an environment where knowledge and creativity drive productivity and economic growth. Information, technology, and learning are thus central to a community’s prosperity. The Menlo Park Library must play a leading role in helping the community adapt to this new environment. To do this, the Library must align services to support community goals, provide access to content in all formats, ensure economic sustainability, and cultivate staff competencies and leadership.

Libraries have traditionally been the community center for expanding access to information, educational opportunities, and social connections for all. The challenge now for the Menlo Park Library is to reshape its services with new thinking and bold action to meeting changing user needs in the new environment.

In 2014 the Library completed an organizational review of the workload and performance of Library operations and services as part of a planned review of all City services (Operational and Administrative Review of Library Department, 2014). Recommendations from this review included clarifying the overall direction and vision of the Library with a new strategic plan and assessment measures, and improving organizational structure and staffing levels, updating the service model to reflect current and future user patterns and needs, updating technology, and assessing facility needs to address space concerns.

The City of Menlo Park, and the Belle Haven neighborhood in particular, is changing rapidly. The influx of new technology firms such as Facebook and others is shifting the City’s demographic and economic characteristics tangibly and dramatically. The City anticipates the addition of some 9,000 new residents to its 32,000 citywide population over the next five to ten years.

The Administrative Review noted that the 3,700 square foot Belle Haven branch located within the Belle Haven Elementary School is underutilized, and is inadequate to support the community as it is evolving. Improved library services in Belle Haven were thus identified as a major need for the future.

STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS
The planning process took place from February to June 2016 and consisted of the following activities. The “Strategic Planning Team” referred to below consisted of the consultants plus the library director and three additional library staff.

Identify community characteristics and assess needs.
The Strategic Planning Team compiled data from library and community statistics, recent City and library surveys and reports, news analyses, and economic and housing projections. This information was used by the planning workshop participants at the initial mission and visioning workshop. The Community & Library Facts report is provided in Appendix A.

Clarify library mission, vision and values.
The consultants conducted a half-day workshop in February 2016 with 30 stakeholders (aka “Planning Workshop Group”) to review and refine the library’s core guiding principles. City Manager Alex McIntyre introduced the workshop with a message of inspiration and support on behalf
Facilitate community forums.
The consultants facilitated two forums entitled “Explore the Future!” with a broad cross section of over 40 individuals, including library and City staff, residents, educators, business owners, public safety personnel, Library Commission and Foundation members, and Library Friends. The purpose of the forums was to solicit ideas about the future of the library with directed brainstorming activities and facilitated discussion. Former California State Librarian Susan Hildreth opened the forums with a thought-provoking presentation on the future of public libraries, drawing on key issues from the recent Aspen Institute Dialogue on Public Libraries. The groups explored challenges facing the community as well as the library, priorities for the library, and advice for developing and implementing the nascent strategic plan.

Community challenges center on tensions generated from rising costs of living, particularly housing affordability and income inequality, and transportation congestion, exacerbated in part by the growth and gentrification occurring in the Belle Haven area and throughout Menlo Park. Homelessness also appears to be a visible problem for Menlo Park, and perhaps for the region in general.

Interview community leaders and stakeholders.
The consultants interviewed nine library and community key stakeholders to elicit focused insight on community and library goals and priorities. Individuals interviewed represented a variety of community sectors, including City Council and staff, Library Commission, Library Foundation, local businesses, Menlo Park residents, and a neighboring library. The report on the interviews is provided in Appendix B. The following individuals were interviewed:

- Nancy Andrus, Menlo Park resident; Librarian, Sunnyvale Public Library
- Cherise Brandell, Director, Community Services Department
- Anna Chow, former Library Foundation member, local small business owner
- Clay Curtin, Assistant to the City Manager
- Clark Kepler, Library Foundation; former owner Kepler Books
- Alex McIntyre, City Manager
- Peter Ohtaki, City Councilmember
- Jill Parker, former Library Foundation member
- Anne Wellner De Veer, former Library Commissioner

Conduct community survey.
A survey of library users and nonusers collected information on public perceptions of various aspects of library use, including facilities and space needs, importance of current and desired services and programming, awareness of resources (particularly digital resources), and website usability. Three hundred and thirty-four usable responses were received. The survey report and instrument are provided in Appendix C.
Facilitate strategic planning workshop (SWOT analysis).
The 30-member Planning Workshop Group met with the consultants for the second time in May 2016 to work through a facilitated half-day Strengths – Weaknesses – Opportunities – Threats exercise.

Facilitate development of Strategic Directions and SMART Goals.
The Strategic Planning Team worked with the consultants to develop the overall strategic directions for the plan, with achievable and measurable goals embedded within the five-year timeframe of the plan.

The consultants and Strategic Planning Team reviewed numerous documents and data sources throughout the process:
- City of Menlo Park Operational and Administrative Review of Library Department (January 2015)
- Menlo Park Library User Survey (Fall 2015)
- City of Menlo Park 2015 City Satisfaction Survey (January 2016)
- Library Commission Quarterly Report (October 2015)
- Focus Groups to Determine Library Needs in Belle Haven (Library Commission, January 2016)
- Belle Haven Community Snapshot (Library Commission, September 2015)
- California State Library Statistics
- Ed-Data: Fiscal, Demographic, and Performance Data on California’s K-12 Schools
- U.S. Census Bureau State and County QuickFacts
- Menlo Park Today

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
We are deeply indebted to everyone who contributed to this planning process: Workshop attendees, forum participants, survey takers, the Menlo Park City Council and City government, the Menlo Park community, and the entire staff of the Menlo Park Library who worked tirelessly so that our activities ran smoothly. This plan could not have come together without your time, energy, and hard work.

Thank you!

APPENDICES
- Appendix A: Community and Library Facts
- Appendix B: Report on Stakeholder Interviews
- Appendix C: Community Survey 2016 Report
- Appendix D: SMARTGoals and Evaluation Scorecard
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Linda Avak, patron
Lynn Bramlett, Library Commissioner
Kathleen Bales, Literacy Partners
Ken Becker, library staff
Linda Bonde, Friends of Library
Wayne Bonde, Friends of Library
Natalie Bonham, Community Services Department
Doug Booth, Project Read
Cherise Brandell, Director, Community Services Department
Jacquie Cebrian, Library Commissioner
Jessica Chavez, library staff
Anna Chow, Foundation, Cheeky Monkey Toy Store
Chris Christensen, library staff
Monica Corman, Foundation
Clay Curtin, Assistant to the City Manager
Ed Doody, library staff
Michael Flanagan, library staff
Nancy Flowers, Foundation
Jean Forrester, Keplers Bookstore
Mike Goodkind, Project Read
Steve Haas, Friends of Library
Betsy Halaby, Foundation
Elyce Haskell, Friends of Library
Brian Henry, Public Works Department
Andrea Herz, Literacy Partners
Lori Heyman, patron
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Polly Jensen, library staff
Lisa Jones, Friends of Library
John Kadvany, patron
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Blanca Madriz, library staff
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Jeneen Nammar, library staff
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Anna Zara, former Library Commissioner
Enhancing the quality of life