



Meal Plan 5

Future Menus for Library Technology Services



Close your eyes. Imagine you are in your library ten years from now. What do you see? How are people using technology to meet their needs? Now imagine it is only five years from now. What do you see? Let yourself dream of the possibilities for a few minutes.

When talking about their public computing services, it is not uncommon to hear a rural librarian say, “If I just had a day or two to catch up. But, how is it possible to think about tomorrow when it is impossible to feel caught up with today?”

This section of the Cookbook “serves up” some key tips, resources, and recommendations for planning and preparing your public computer services for tomorrow. The rapid rate of change and the uncertainty of the future make it impossible to anticipate just what tomorrow will look like. However, with a clear picture of where you are right now, some strategic planning, routine scanning of the horizon (trend-watching), and a flexible and innovative mindset, it is possible to feel good about your library’s technology services.

TOPICS COVERED:

- What’s Cooking in Library Technology?
- Keeping Up in the Kitchen—What You Need to Stay Future-Focused
- More Chef Ideas on Technology, Support, and Fundraising
- Baking on a Tight Technology Budget
- Fast Food—Meal Plan 5 Summary



What's Cooking in Library Technology?

Over the last several years, many libraries have been providing computer access to their patrons. This development has changed the nature of library work and operations. Expectations have also changed. The library's very role in the community has been altered. As much as things may change, however, it is likely that this is a role that will remain. These four trends reflect technology changes and developments that will most likely have an impact on your public computer resources.

- Wireless technology
- Social uses of technology
- Assisting users of technology
- Changing demographics

General tips for keeping up with these trends follow.

WIRELESS TECHNOLOGY

Laptop computers are ever-increasingly popular. As this trend is likely to grow, libraries will continue to evolve the ways in which they meet wireless technology needs. If your library currently does not provide wireless access, it might be something you want to consider. Wireless access is a relatively low-cost service to implement and it can expand the library's ability to serve community needs. In urban areas, residents have numerous options for high speed Internet connectivity at home, at cafes, and other businesses. In rural communities, however, the library is often one of the only places where community members can find high speed access. Beyond simply providing wireless access, here are some other things to consider:

- **Space for laptop users.** Are there tables and work areas located near electrical outlets yet away from direct sunlight (which can cause glare)?
- **Printing.** Is there a way to allow laptop users to print?
- **The benefits of laptop purchases (rather than or in addition to the PCs in the library).** The benefits of this would include space flexibility and convenience. Drawbacks or potential challenges include security and durability.
- **Wireless availability promotion.** Promoting wireless access is essential if it is going to have an impact.



Wireless in the Woods

“Not only are we the only people in town with broadband access, we’re wireless as well in our little library. It’s kind of cool. Here we are out in the middle of the woods and you see people sitting around in their hunting clothes with their laptops. We have one student who’s staying in town working on her master’s degree. She comes in and works online, because she has access to the internet. We’ve had young people take their hunter’s safety training online. We have a trucker who will sit out in the parking lot with his laptop if we’re not open and look for jobs online. We have another telecommuter in town who comes in with a laptop and sits here and works.”

*Margaret Patterson
Elk River District Library, Elk River, ID*

SOCIAL USES OF TECHNOLOGY

Ten years ago, many libraries prohibited the use of e-mail on their public computers. Today, e-mail is one of the most popular uses of library machines. The changed attitude towards e-mail reflects an evolution in the way that public computers are viewed. Initially, many libraries felt the machines should only be used for “library-related” things such as *serious* research. It soon became clear, however, that the computers were not only needed for information-gathering, but were needed for communication too. Libraries not only started allowing e-mail usage on public computers, but also started using e-mail to communicate with other library patrons.


Although e-mail is still incredibly popular, people are communicating in many other ways, too. Instant messaging (IM), for example, allows real-time communication. In the past, many library computer policies prohibited the use of IM. These kinds of policies, however, are becoming less and less prevalent as time goes by. Some libraries are using IM to communicate – among staff members and also with patrons.

When the web first became popular in the 90s, people tended to see it as a place to go to search for information and to try to find content. It still plays that role, but it has evolved into a much more social technology, too. People go to the web, not just to view information, but also to contribute. In the past, a person might go to an online version of a newspaper to read an article. Now, many newspapers have made it possible to post comments and enter into a discussion about the article being read.

Other examples of social technologies include such sites as:

- **Flickr** (<http://www.flickr.com>): This photo sharing site allows users to upload photographs. When a photograph is uploaded, the user adds keywords or “tags”, which identify the content of the photograph. People can then perform keyword searches in Flickr. They can also leave comments when viewing photographs.
- **YouTube** (<http://www.youtube.com>): This is another popular site. It is used for video sharing and is very similar to Flickr. Users upload videos and assign tags. Others can then search those videos and also leave comments.

The impact that these sorts of technologies have on library services is still being realized. Many libraries today are thinking about the different ways in which they



can use social sites like Flickr and YouTube to communicate with and meet the needs of library users. Flickr is being used to document library events, library building projects, and more. YouTube is being used to host and share videos featuring tours of a library, explanations about how-to use a library resource, and more.

In addition to thinking about how they can use these sites to communicate with patrons, some libraries are looking into the different ways they can help their patrons learn to effectively use these tools.



OTHER TASTY RECIPES

Flickr and YouTube Information and Examples

- Check out: 365 Days in the Library for an example of how libraries using Flickr.
<http://www.flickr.com/groups/365libs/>
- Check out the Allen County Public Library in Fort Wayne, IN using YouTube as an information resource for staff and patrons:
<http://www.youtube.com/profile?user=askacpl>

Wireless Networks

- Infopeople's overview of wireless networking
<http://infopeople.org/resources/security/network/wireless.html>
- Web Junction's wireless page with links to resources, including a case study and a Webinar recording
<http://webjunction.org/do/Navigation?category=524>
- Bill Drew's "Wireless Librarian" blog covering issues of concern to libraries
<http://wirelesslibraries.blogspot.com/>

Learning About Social Networking

- The Learning 2.0 training program from the Charlotte/Mecklenburg Public Library:
http://www.infotoday.com/cilmag/feb07/Blowers_Reed.shtml

ASSISTING USERS OF TECHNOLOGY

Almost all libraries now view the provision of public computers as an important part of the community. A person traveling across the country could pretty much count on being able to stop in libraries all along the way to access the Internet. Upgrading, replacing, and expanding that equipment, as well as network bandwidth will continue to be essential roles for the foreseeable future.

A role which is currently less consistently prioritized, but which could potentially expand, is the provision of technology assistance to community members. Some libraries offer classes for the public. Coverage includes such topics as web searching, using e-mail, and more. In rural communities, there are often no other options for learning about technology, so the library is stepping in to assist in this area.



As the community begins to view the library as a source for technology learning, topics and formats may expand and vary. Libraries may begin to look at the gaps that exist. Are there people currently not using technology, who could, in fact, benefit from its use? Can the library serve a role as an intermediary?

Here are just a few technology learning format ideas:

- **A MySpace Class:** MySpace, a social networking site, is one of the most popular sites on the Internet today. The majority of users of this site are teenagers and they probably do not need or want an introductory class to be offered by the library. Are there parents, however, who would appreciate that kind of class? Consider asking a few regular users of MySpace to participate in the class to provide an insider perspective.
- **An Internet Safety and Security Class:** As more and more business is conducted over the Internet, online safety and security are going to continue to be growing concerns. Is there a role the library can play in helping to educate people about ways to avoid potential threats? Consider inviting a guest speaker who is knowledgeable about the topic. Your state's Attorney General's office may be able to provide valuable information and resources, too.



For Patrons Who are Hungry for Technology Information

"We offer classes for the public ranging from computer and Internet basics, to computer maintenance and Internet safety classes. Our goal is to teach patrons about using computers properly and safely. Visit our web site and use our lesson plans at www.hibbing.lib.mn.us."

*Chris Magnusson
Hibbing Public Library, Hibbing, MN*

CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS

Technology is about serving people! Meeting the needs of the people in your community should be at the core of all technology decisions. When you think about the future of your library technology, you must also think about the future of the people in your community. How has your community changed in the last ten years? Are there an increasing number of older adults? How many teens live in your area? Has there been a rapid increase in the number of new Americans in your community? These types of demographic trends and changes could and should have an impact on the services your library provides. Think about the various demographic groups in your community. Which groups are you serving well? Which groups might you be missing? Then think specifically about the way various groups use technology. The specific technology needs that you identify from a brainstorming session with teenagers in your community will most likely differ from the needs identified in a brainstorming session with older adults. Find ways to directly work with these groups to determine and design services that will be most effective.



Keeping Up in the Kitchen—What You Need to Stay Future-Focused

Looking out at the flow of activity in the library, success is felt when it is apparent that needs are being met, when users are being pleasantly surprised by the innovative range of services the library offers, and perhaps at the core, when the library is making a difference in people's lives. By creating an environment of continuous learning, by finding ways to stay aware of changing trends and needs, and by staying committed to thoughtful planning, it is possible to achieve that vision in your rural library.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

The four trends just covered are only a few of the many technology possibilities for libraries. How can your library achieve goals and prepare for an unknown future? When doing strategic technology planning, here are six key areas to consider:

- **Staff technology skills (and volunteers and trustees) as a continuous priority.** Make learning an expected part of everyone's work routine. Find ways to teach one another and to help keep each other apprised of changes and ideas. This culture of learning will help alleviate some of the stress around not feeling "caught up". The reality is, there will always be more to learn. Try to embrace this thought and even make it fun!
- **The continued development of patron skills.** Some people come to the library with strong technology skills and high expectations. Find ways to stay aware of popular tools and "gadgets". Are you noticing a lot of people carrying iPods or other MP3 players? Ask questions and pay attention to the uses. There is also a need, however, to always look at the gaps. Who does not know about technologies that could potentially benefit them? What role can the library play in closing that gap?
- **A means for continued awareness and planning need to be in place.** Some ideas to be discussed in more depth later in this section include the development of a new technology advisory group, a guest speakers series, and/or panel discussions on technological topics.
- **A larger library world connection to glean new ideas/create partnerships for learning, purchasing, and more.** Use online resources like WebJunction (<http://www.webjunction.org>) to connect with librarians from many places. Consider organizing face-to-face meetings or partnerships with libraries in your geographic area, too.
- **Community outreach and communication to develop relationships.** The goal here is for the library to be seen as a center of technology in the community. Are there other technology resources that exist in the community? Can partnerships be formed?



- **The Pew Internet Reports** (<http://www.pewInternet.org>) **site offers an overview of the changing ways in which people use technology.** You may also find it useful to view census data (<http://www.census.gov>) for your community – past, present, and future predictions – and to think about the implications they may have for library services, including public computers.
- **Advocating for the library!** Make sure that you get the word out about all of the great services you offer. Do not take for granted that people know about the technology that is available in today's libraries. Many do not. When you begin offering a new service, make sure to highlight it prominently with publicity efforts. Develop relationships with your local legislators. When a library technology issue is being discussed in the legislature, make sure your local legislators know how the issue affects your library and community.

TECHNOLOGY COLLABORATION

Keeping up with technology and generating innovative ideas for library services are not solitary activities. When you involve more people, you will bring more energy and creativity to the projects. There are numerous ways to create collaborative new technology sessions. Examples include:

- **Start a new technology committee.** Involve members of the library staff and others from the community. Invite people who are excited about technology and are interested in getting together several times a year to share new discoveries and ideas. Consider inviting a local teacher or school media specialist to participate. Ask individuals with hobbies that involve technology (e.g., like digital photography) to join the group.
- **Use a teen advisory committee.** If you have one (or are interested in starting one), consider asking that group's participants to devote some time each year to exploring new technologies.
- **Host a technology guest lecture series at the library.** Invite speakers from the community. Local schools, local business, and local clubs and organizations would all be good places to seek out speakers.
- **Participate in or organize a technology fair once per year.** Highlight new technology in use at the library. Invite local groups and classes to display examples of their technology projects.



Collaboration is the Key

"We are connected to the Internet through a cooperation between the county, the local school, Henrietta ISD, and the library. Because we're a county library, the county paid for a fiber optic cable from one of the school offices down the alley to the library, and we're hooked into an aerial wire to the main school building. We do not pay anything for our Internet connection."

*Norma Herne
Edwards Public Library, Henrietta, TX*



More Chef Ideas on Technology, Support, and Fundraising

Almost every innovative technology or technical support story revolves around one key thing—connection. Rural libraries are creating success stories by reaching out to other libraries, groups and individuals within their own community, and others. Sometimes these connections result in financial benefits to the library. They can also result in greater awareness and enhanced services. All of the connections expand the reach of the library far beyond its physical walls.

YOUR TECHNOLOGY CONNECTION

As you read these inspiring stories, be thinking about your library's connections. On a sheet of paper, inventory the connections you have made or could make which would enhance the library's services and technology:

- Individuals within the community
- Groups within the community
- Individuals and groups beyond your community
- Legislators
- Other libraries
- Others

Creating and maintaining these relationships is an ongoing process. Try to find ways to thank your existing connections. When you approach a potential new connection, be sure to highlight the ways in which the library can help them.

FUNDRAISING

The key to successful fundraising is to know what you want and need, and have the ability to articulate those needs to others. Asking for \$500 for the general library fund is not quite as powerful as asking for \$500 for a specific need. Help potential donors see the benefits that will be derived because of their contribution.



A Smart Plan for Funding Technology

"Our library took to heart the recommendation by the Gates Foundation to anticipate upgrading the Gates computers received in the late 90's. Allowing for time to establish some very positive statistics, the library staff and trustees approached the local town council and asked for a small amount to be added to our current budget to set aside each year for such upgrades. It was our feeling that it was better to gain a little, rather than ask for the full amount in one year. It was approved and within five years, there was enough saved to upgrade the computers and maintain a quality service to our citizens. The town and library board continues to maintain that "fund" to save for the next upgrade."

Crystal Hamrick
Nutter Fort Public Library, WV



Baking on a Tight Technology Budget

Special grants and fundraising events can help a library expand the amount and types of technology they are able to offer. It is important, however, to realize that technology costs are going to be ongoing and recurring. A computer purchase is not a one-time expense. You need to create technology specific line items in the library budget. In addition to hardware, software, and network connectivity dollar items, you should consider including staff continuing education as a budget item.

When making technology purchasing decisions, strategic planning will require weighing the costs versus the benefits. When considering the costs, do not forget to include staff time for training and support on an ongoing basis. Also consider replacement costs that will be ongoing.



OTHER TASTY RECIPES

Rural Library Funding

- WebJunction
Resources and best practices for rural libraries seeking ways to cultivate funding which supports library programs and services.
<http://www.webjunction.org/do/Navigation?category=13283>



Fast Food—Meal Plan 5 Summary

- These four trends reflect technology changes and developments that will most likely have an impact on your public computer resources.
 - Wireless technology
 - Social uses of technology
 - Assisting users of technology
 - Changing demographics
- If your library currently does not provide wireless access, it might be something you want to consider. Wireless access is a relatively low-cost service to implement and it can expand the library's ability to serve community needs.
- The web has evolved into a much more social technology, too. People go to the web, not just to view information, but also to contribute. For example, many newspapers today have made it possible to post comments and enter into a discussion about the article being read. Other examples of social technologies include such sites as **Flickr** (<http://www.flickr.com>), a photo sharing site that allows users to upload photographs, and **YouTube** (<http://www.youtube.com>) for video sharing.
- A role which is currently less consistently prioritized, but which could potentially expand, is the provision of technology assistance to community members. Some libraries offer classes for the public. Coverage includes such topics as web searching, using e-mail, and more. In rural communities, there are often no other options for learning about technology, so the library is stepping in to assist in this area.
- When doing strategic technology planning, consider:
 - Staff technology skills (and volunteers and trustees) as a continuous priority.
 - The continued development of patron skills.
 - A means for continued awareness and planning need to be in place.
 - A larger library world connection to glean new ideas/create partnerships for learning, purchasing, and more.
 - Community outreach and communication to develop relationships.
 - Advocating for the library!
- Almost every innovative technology or technical support story revolves around one key thing—connection. Rural libraries are creating success stories by reaching out to other libraries, groups and individuals within their own community, and others.



MENU 5 CHECKLIST

- Beyond simply providing wireless access, consider:
 - Space for laptop users.
 - Printing.
 - The benefits of laptop purchases (rather than or in addition to the PCs in the library).
 - Wireless availability promotion.
- Look at the technology learning gaps that exist in your library. Are there people currently not using technology, who could, in fact, benefit from its use? Can the library serve a role as an intermediary?
- Think about the different ways in which your library can use social sites to communicate with and meet the needs of your users.
- Keep up with technology and generate innovative ideas for library services:
 - Start a new technology committee.
 - Use a teen advisory committee.
 - Host a technology guest lecture series at the library.
 - Participate in or organize a technology fair once per year.
- Inventory the connections you have made or could make which would enhance the library's services and technology:
 - Individuals within the community
 - Groups within the community
 - Individuals and groups beyond your community
 - Legislators
 - Other libraries
 - Others?
- Create and maintain these relationships is an ongoing process, and try to find ways to thank your existing connections.
- Create technology specific line items in the library budget. In addition to hardware, software, and network connectivity dollar items, consider including staff continuing education as a budget item.