

Date: June 10, 2021

To: Thomas B. Modica, City Manager 

From: Glenda Williams, Director of Library Services 

For: Mayor and Members of the City Council

Subject: **Library Services Performance Audit**

On [March 2, 2021](#), the City Council requested the City Manager to identify additional resources needed to implement changes from the Long Beach City Auditor's *Library Services Performance Audit of 2020 Operations* to meet the access and equity flaws identified. The City Council requested additional information for the following six specific recommendations:

- Making library materials and programs readily available in languages other than English
- Adjusting library hours to align with community needs for access
- Limiting fines and other sanctions to increase access
- Having adaptive technology available at all 12 libraries
- Creating a data collection system to track program use and feedback
- Utilizing, increasing and improving promotional tools (multilingual) to increase community awareness of the various library services and programs

This memorandum is in response to that request.

BACKGROUND

In February 2021, City Auditor Laura Doud released [Library Services Performance Audit: The Library Needs to Improve its Services to Equitably Meet Diverse Community Needs](#). The audit was the product of many meetings with the Library Services Department (Department) Management Team, focus groups, and interviews with Department staff, community partners, stakeholders, and residents to fully understand the challenges and hurdles the Department must overcome to provide the best possible service to Long Beach residents. The audit recognized the valuable offerings of the Department and its importance in addressing challenges facing our diverse community such as digital inclusion and income equity.

The Department continues to strive to deliver core services such as children and teen programming, educational support, services to older adults, workforce development, and reading and audiovisual materials for all age groups in alignment with best practices defined by the American Library Association. In addition to preserving core services, we have led the way in innovation with our makerspace and Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics (STEAM) focused "Studio" programs. In 2017, the Department was recognized for its innovative approach to library services by the Institute of Museum and Library Services with a National Medal, the highest honor that can be earned by a public library or museum in the United States.

Service innovation and partnerships remain a focus for the Department. Prior to the pandemic, a Veteran's Resource Center was added to the old Main Library and has connected with local groups serving veterans through a statewide partnership. A pilot program incorporating social work (MSW) interns was added to our business model to help address the public's increasing need for homelessness, mental health, and substance abuse resources. That pilot, in partnership with the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), was successful and in December 2020, DHHS was notified of an allocation from a second round of Homeless Housing, Assistance, and Prevention (HHAP) state funding for Long Beach. This additional funding initiated the planning process, which will include the provision of public health professionals in the Billie Jean King (BJK) Main, Michelle Obama, and Mark Twain Libraries for two years. There is also the potential for public health professionals to rove and assist with additional libraries based on need.

However, there is still work to be done to better reach and serve Long Beach's economically, linguistically, and racially diverse residents. After a review of a year's worth of all library programs onsite and offsite, assessing library services across 12 Long Beach public libraries, evaluating library materials and borrowing data, and more, the City Auditor provided a list of 29 recommendations. We look forward to the opportunity to implement the improvements recommended by the City Auditor and working to better service the Long Beach community within our current budget as we are able to do so, while recognizing that some recommendations will require additional funding.

LIBRARY MATERIALS AND PROGRAMS AVAILABLE IN OTHER LANGUAGES

One of the greatest challenges currently facing the Department is its lack of permanent bilingual staffing in professional and paraprofessional classifications, which are responsible for selecting/deselecting library materials, and developing, implementing, and evaluating library programs. As opportunities to bring on new staff arise, the Department is committed to hiring candidates with language skills and has already begun to make this a priority. For example, when the BJK Main Library had a General Librarian vacancy in Fiscal Year 2020 (FY 20), the position was filled by a bilingual candidate and the duties for that position were reframed to focus on collection development, outreach and community engagement. The Department expects to fill four additional General Librarian vacancies in FY 21.

The Department recognizes the critical need to focus resources on developing a diverse collection, both linguistic and cultural. To that effect, the Department began training an additional bilingual librarian to assist with selection of Spanish language materials system-wide. This training includes conducting needs assessments and community profiles for each branch library, meetings with branch senior staff, and developing profiles with book vendors that correspond to collection gaps and high interest areas. Additionally, the library has conducted a diversity audit of its current collection, which provides a detailed analysis of cultural diversity reviewing data points such as author, publisher, protagonist, setting, and theme. The diversity categories are based on interest and content and include Asian, Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Middle Eastern, Jewish, Muslim, LGBTQIA+, mental health, and neuro and physical disability interests. The Department will continue to prioritize this work whenever possible; however, these are additional duties assigned to staff members who already maintain a full workload.

During the past two years, with existing staff using grant funding, the Department has added several new Spanish language programs, including Cuentitos, Círculo de Cuentos, Cáigale al Zoom, Club de Noticias, Aprende Palabras, Read con Amigos, and Lotería @ the Library. At its current funding level, the Department will continue to foster partnerships with community organizations such as United Cambodian Community, Latinos in Action, and Centro CHA, who are able to provide meaningful, quality programs for non- or limited-English-speakers and ensure that bilingual professional and paraprofessional staff are assigned to library locations where the need for language skills is greatest.

However, the Department understands the need to offer more diverse programming citywide at all 12 library locations. This could be accomplished through the creation of a Bilingual Services division, similar to the Youth and Family Services division that coordinates youth literacy and parent engagement systemwide and liaises with the Long Beach Unified School District and Long Beach Early Childhood Education Committee. In partnership with each library location, a Bilingual Services division would develop, implement, and evaluate Spanish, Khmer, and Tagalog programs, and be responsible for selecting appropriate materials for purchase in languages other than English. Additionally, this division would help revise current customer service protocols that are tailored to English-speaking and digitally-literate patrons, provide input on library signage and flow, and represent the library at community events and meetings. Other services might include a dedicated phone line for Spanish-speaking populations and LBPL en Español, a Spanish section on our www.longbeach.gov/library website intentionally written for a Spanish-speaking audience, not merely a translation of English content. Bilingual and bicultural staff would not just market current programs and services to non-English speakers but would move the library forward by designing new culturally-relevant programs and services directly benefiting and meeting the needs of non- or limited-English-speaking communities.

The estimated annual cost to create a division dedicated to serving non- or limited-English-speaking communities in Long Beach is \$715,000. This includes funding for 5.0 FTEs comprised of both professional and paraprofessional staff (\$540,000), books and digital resources in languages other than English (\$150,000), and program supplies (\$25,000).

ADJUSTING LIBRARY HOURS

During the [Department FY 19 budget presentation](#) on August 21, 2018, I provided a plan to restructure the current libraries schedule by moving half the libraries to a Sunday through Thursday schedule (retaining the other six libraries on the current Tuesday through Saturday schedule), in order for a library to be open and accessible to Long Beach residents every day of the week. A survey was made available online and in print at every library location, and promoted on all the Department's social media accounts and website. Included in the survey was adding a sixth day of service, of which 55 percent of respondents preferred Monday. For those responding in Spanish, Tagalog and Khmer, the preference for Monday as a sixth day of service was 80 percent. Based on the public's response, libraries open hours were maintained Tuesday through Saturday, as it is to this day.

On March 2, 2021, the City Council requested an additional analysis of how library hours could be modified within the existing Department budget. In response, on April 8, 2021, the Department provided the [Options to Restructure Library Services](#) memorandum to the Mayor

and City Council. An explanation of factors that contributed to the decision to provide library hours uniformly across all locations was included. The most significant factor was the need for public services staff to work identical shifts to cover vacations, leaves of absences, and daily sick calls with no interruption in service or branch closures.

To remain budget neutral, expansion of hours at some libraries will result in a loss of hours at other library locations. Three budget neutral options to restructure library hours were provided, along with one option requiring enhanced funding to expand open library hours:

Option 1 – \$2.9 Million Budget Enhancement. Expanded seven days of service at four proposed libraries (BJK Main, El Dorado, Mark Twain and Michelle Obama). Status quo for remaining eight neighborhood libraries.

The four proposed libraries would add two additional days of service on Sundays and Mondays. These four libraries welcomed more than half of all library visitors, more than half of all items were borrowed from them, and they have more than 60 percent of computers, computer sessions, and Family Learning Centers sessions systemwide. This option maintains the current library hours for the remaining eight libraries. This scenario and the following three options include the addition of three Public Health Professionals to assist people experiencing homelessness, food insecurity, mental health, and addiction challenges.

Option 2 – Budget Neutral. Expanded Seven Days of Service at Four Proposed Libraries (BJK Main, Michelle Obama, Mark Twain, and El Dorado). Close Eight Remaining Neighborhood Libraries.

Similar to Option 1, this proposed restructure expands service hours at the four largest and busiest libraries—BJK Main, Michelle Obama, Mark Twain, and El Dorado—to seven days, adding library service on Sundays and Mondays as mentioned above. To keep this option budget neutral, the closure of eight neighborhood libraries is required. The closed neighborhood libraries could be repurposed for alternate City uses yet to be determined, or sold to generate additional revenue. The eight neighborhood libraries are also the oldest Library facilities, built between 1929 to 1969, and in need of repairs due to deferred maintenance.

Option 3 - Budget Neutral. Expanded Seven Days of Service at Three Proposed Libraries (BJK Main, Michelle Obama, and Mark Twain). Reduce Service to Only Three Days for Remaining Nine Neighborhood Libraries.

With this option, the three largest public libraries (BJK Main, Michelle Obama, and Mark Twain) would operate seven days a week and the remaining neighborhood libraries would reduce to three days of service, Tuesday through Thursday. This option was proposed as part of the FY 21 budget process, but was not adopted by the City Council. This approach increases library accessibility in socioeconomically challenged areas of the city - Downtown, North, and Central Long Beach; while retaining minimum service levels at smaller neighborhood libraries serving other parts of the city. The three largest and newest libraries would see a robust enhancement in services in addition to core library services, including a full range of public programs for children, teens, and adults

and seven-day access. Library staff from the remaining nine libraries would rotate into the three flagship libraries to allow the additional open hours and expanded services.

Option 4 - Budget Neutral. Expanded Hours of Service at Three Proposed Libraries (BJK Main, Michelle Obama, and Mark Twain). Close Three Neighborhood Libraries.

With this option, the three largest libraries (BJK Main, Michelle Obama, and Mark Twain) would offer the largest number of expanded morning and evening hours: Tuesday through Thursday, 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. This expansion makes visiting the library more convenient for everyone, including families with young children, students, job seekers, and residents who work during weekdays. Evening hours would allow greater attendance, and core services such as public computers and homework assistance would be available for additional hours. Three smaller neighborhood libraries would need to close to allow current staff at those locations to be reassigned to the flagship libraries to assist with staffing the additional open hours. No changes would be made to the schedule or staffing of the remaining six branches. Alternatively, to keep the three smaller neighborhood libraries open, it would require an increase of \$1.1 to \$1.4 million based on FY 21 costs at pre-pandemic open services hours and staffing levels.

The Department is in the process of engaging the residents of Long Beach for their preference of open library hours for their preferred library through a Library Services survey. It is available in multiple languages, online and in print. In addition to obtaining information for open library hours, the survey also asks for input regarding the types of adaptive technology desired in the public libraries. An analysis of the survey will be provided to the City Council later this year, along with options to implement the findings.

LIMITING FINES

Fines for overdue materials have been identified by City Auditor Laura Doud as a significant barrier to equitable access to library services. Approximately 43,000 adults and 6,000 children and teens in Long Beach are currently barred from borrowing library books, audiobooks, DVDs, and magazines because they owe fines in excess of \$20. Analysis of libraries-user database shows that patrons with barred accounts are concentrated in the most economically disadvantaged parts of the city, Central and North Long Beach. This inability to access the City's public library resources disproportionately and negatively impacts communities of color, a trend that is mirrored in other urban public library systems across the country.

Historically, overdue fines charged by public libraries were seen as a way to encourage the timely return of borrowed items. However, in 2019, the American Library Association (ALA), the oldest and largest association of library professionals in the world, instituted a "Resolution on Eliminating Monetary Library fines as a Form of Social Justice." Some of the conclusions leading to this resolution cite that fines are economically discriminatory and act as a barrier to access, as well as mounting evidence that the elimination of fines actually increases library card adoption and library usage. The ALA also resolved to encourage all libraries to move toward actively eliminating fines for overdue materials. When the Chicago Public Library eliminated late fees in 2019, it resulted in a 240 percent increase in the number of books returned. A year after it eliminated late fees, Salt Lake City Public Library reported a 16 percent increase in the number of items borrowed and an increase of 26,000 library cardholders.

Additionally, the San Francisco Public Library voted in 2019 to eliminate late fees after concluding that fines do not consistently result in the return of library items and that fines disproportionately affect low income communities, racial minority communities, and communities with lower educational attainment.

The City of Los Angeles arrived at similar conclusions as they instituted the Library Commission’s “Recommendation to establish a Fine-Free Policy for the Los Angeles Public Library to remove barriers for access,” on December 2, 2019. They reasoned that “Libraries that have eliminated fines have reported increases in material circulation and card registrations, staff morale, and customer satisfaction. In addition, staff have more time to focus on increased customer service experiences, library operations, and one-on-one interactions with patrons.”

To date, more than 100 public library systems have eliminated overdue fines across the nation. The following California public libraries have joined this initiative:

Library System	# of branches/locations	Overdue fees eliminated for:
Los Angeles County	81	Anyone under age 21
Los Angeles City	72	Everyone
Santa Monica	5	Children & teens
San Diego City	36	Everyone
Altadena	2	Everyone
Pasadena	5	Children & teens
San Mateo County	13	Everyone

If the City Council approved the permanent elimination of overdue fines for the residents of Long Beach as recommended by the ALA, the Department would implement “Fine Free Basics” best practices:

- No new late fees would be charged
- Existing fees would be canceled
- Library users would still be charged for lost or damaged items

On [March 16, 2021](#), the City Council approved the Long Beach Recovery Act to fund economic, public health and fiscal initiatives for Long Beach residents, business owners, and workers critically impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Included in the adopted plan is the allocation of \$300,000 to waive library fines for one year to support the Healthy and Safe Community initiative. Pre-pandemic, the Department brought in an estimated revenue of \$250,000 per year to the City through late fee charges. As a direct result of this action and because library service has not yet been fully restored to pre-pandemic levels, all overdue fines for materials returned in good condition are currently being waived.

ADAPTIVE TECHNOLOGY AT ALL LONG BEACH PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Currently, adaptive technology is available at BJK Main Library in the Center for Adaptive Technology (CAT) and at Michelle Obama Neighborhood Library. These locations offer dedicated computers with adaptive software including JAWS screen reader program, WYNN

Wizard literacy software tool, Zoom Text magnification software tool, and Dragon Naturally Speaking speech recognition software along with assistive devices such as hearing loops, high contrast, large print and Braille keyboards, Tracker Pro, joystick and rollerball mice.

In the short-term and within current funding constraints, the Department is taking a multifaceted approach to expanding this service. Staff who work regularly in the CAT will identify the assistive devices most in demand by current patrons. These will be purchased in FY 21 and allocated to the 10 branches who lack this technology. CAT staff will also research low- or no-cost apps available to download to phones or tablets and provide training to library staff at each location so they are able to recommend solutions to patrons who may be differently abled. Additionally, to help gauge community interest and need, the Department will conduct a Library Services survey that includes questions regarding adaptive technology. The results of this survey will shape the Department's long-term strategic planning. Finally, the Department will actively seek new avenues to promote its current tools and continue to grow its long partnership with the Disabled Resource Center in Long Beach.

Based on the feedback obtained from the Library Services survey, training will be implemented at each of the neighborhood libraries so that staff are knowledgeable of the existing modifications to technology that can be made without the addition of new hardware or software. An example of this would be instructing staff on how to adjust text and display sizes on the public computers. Library staff will also be trained on how to better recognize and serve the needs of patrons with different abilities. On a smaller scale, simple tools such as magnifying glasses for reading will be purchased for each location. The Department is also working with the Department of Public Works to install hearing loops in some library meeting rooms.

For a greater expansion of adaptive technology, such as dedicated computers with sophisticated software and staff that are trained to teach it, the Department would require additional funding. The approximate cost to bring most of our existing CAT technology, software, and equipment to additional libraries is \$11,000 per location. Additionally, dedicated staff would be needed to work individually with patrons at neighborhood libraries to provide instruction and teach group classes. The cost for 3.0 FTE staff who would cover multiple sites is approximately \$245,000. Finally, it is likely some facilities may need small upgrades, such as height adjustable furniture. The estimated cost may range from \$2,500-\$10,000 per location.

CREATING A DATA COLLECTION SYSTEM

Beginning the first quarter of 2021, the Department has been engaging the City's Technology and Innovation Department (TID) and the [Center for Government Excellence through John's Hopkins University](#) (GovEx) to improve our data quality and methodology. Through regular coaching sessions over a period of six months, the partnership will develop a detailed and comprehensive data inventory, laying the foundation for advanced data practices in the Department. This engagement will advance our ability to deliver results for residents by improving data management and strengthening performance analytics and processes to ensure a culture of equitable use of data and evidence to improve outcomes for all residents. This work moves the City of Long Beach toward a [What Works Cities Certification](#), the standard of excellence for data-driven local government. After the six-month engagement period with GovEx is completed, the Department will continue to partner with TID to develop a robust open

data portal to share the Department's key performance indicators and measurements with the Long Beach community.

Understanding the importance of collecting accurate and quality data and the need to quickly and seamlessly report and analyze inputs, outputs, outcomes, and impacts of the Department's programmatic work, library management is currently reviewing a number of vendors' data collection tools and products to find the best fit for Department needs. A selection will be made in FY 21 and implemented the following fiscal year. The Department does currently subscribe to a customer relationship management system. Since 2018, the Department has used this to create monthly user feedback surveys, which assist to determine the library's net promoter score (NPS). NPS is a widely used market research metric that queries respondents to rate the likelihood that they would recommend a company, product, or a service to a friend or colleague and is typically interpreted and used as an indicator of customer loyalty. The Long Beach Public Library consistently achieves a monthly NPS score of 85 or higher, while the 2020 average NPS for education/training industry organizations is 71.

Even with improved tools and a new system for data collection, the Department still lacks a dedicated data analyst; a lack of staff resources and capacity is the biggest challenge to moving this work forward. A dedicated data analyst position would cost approximately \$120,000-\$130,000 annually and would provide the maximum benefit for this initiative. The position would also free up library managers to focus on implementing other audit recommendations and improving library operations. For the short-term, partnering with TID and other experts such as GovEx is necessary for the Department to begin accomplishing the improvements needed to leverage data more effectively for reliable insights.

IMPROVING PROMOTIONAL TOOLS

Currently, the Department has various tools at its disposal to improve marketing and community awareness. These include: Savannah, a customer relationship management system with modules for messaging, tracking community demographics, and analyzing cardholder usage behavior; social media accounts and access to Sprout Social and Zencity; and Gale Analytics, a tool that merges the library's usage data with Mosaic segmentation from Experian and other data sources. What the Department lacks is the staff capacity to make the most of these powerful tools.

In the short-term, at current funding levels the library has made several crucial steps to improve marketing and increase community awareness of programs and services. In February 2021, the Department was able to fill a long vacant Community Information Specialist position. Filling this single vacancy literally doubled the FTE count of staff responsible for library marketing. The Department also launched *LBPL Connect*, an e-newsletter delivered via LinkLB and Savannah, and has more than tripled the number of press releases distributed to news outlets. Finally, the Department will launch three separate marketing campaigns in FY 21, including a celebration of the Library's 125th Anniversary, a New Cardholder campaign, and a Return Your Books campaign.

Despite these efforts, for the long-term, the Department remains lacking in adequate staff capacity to deliver the level of sophisticated marketing and community awareness necessary for a large urban library system with a robust programming schedule, offering a wide variety of

special services to an extremely diverse, bicultural community with unique needs. Two FTE Community Information Specialists, an entry level position, and \$8,500 in promotional/office supplies make up the entirety of the Department's current marketing/promotional budget. To provide effective communications to the entire Long Beach community, the Department would greatly benefit from the addition of a bilingual Public Affairs Officer or Public Affairs Assistant, a Visual Arts Specialist, and an increase in budgeted funds for printing, advertising, promotional, and office supplies. Estimated fully-loaded annual costs are shown in the table below:

Position/Item	Fully Loaded Annual Cost
Public Affairs Officer	\$170,000
Public Affairs Assistant	\$105,000
Visual Arts Specialist	\$82,000-\$90,000
Printing, Advertising, Promotional, & Office Supplies	\$35,000

This enhancement would provide the Department with staffing resources that could be dedicated solely to marketing and community awareness efforts; collecting, documenting, and sharing patron feedback to assist the library in developing more relevant programs; and discovering and analyzing user trends to help the library pivot and innovate when developing new services. It would provide the additional benefit of freeing up time and energy of professional public services staff, including General and Senior Librarians, who often currently must create their own promotional materials for distribution.

FINAL COMMENTS

Thank you for the opportunity to expand on the recent Library Services performance audit with steps to implement 6 of the 29 recommendations within the Department's current budget as well as with enhanced funding. If you have any questions, please contact me at (562) 570-6016.

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