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Libraries, Technology, And The Route To Relevance

By better aligning their services to community needs, they can target inequities and support economic opportunity

Cameron Chavira

Like the footings beneath the shelves they line, books have traditionally formed the foundation of the services that public libraries offer their communities. However, with the shift from print to digital publishing, libraries face a battle in maintaining their status as bastions for learning, community engagement, workforce development and citizenship.



This challenge has not gone unnoticed by local-government budget-writers, who are increasingly likely to cut funding for libraries in favor of more "necessary" departments and programs. Nevertheless, library professionals remain hopeful that technology will help moderate inequities in areas such as access to information, educational achievement and economic opportunity. But to successfully leverage technology to this effect, we must make sure that those who make funding decisions see libraries not as stuffy stacks of yellowing pages but as modern community learning centers.

This can be achieved through thoughtful assessment and partnership. Here's how:

First, libraries need to identify service gaps by evaluating the needs of their users against the services they provide. Technology can be a great help here, given the variety of data-driven mapping tools now available to help shape precise community profiles. These tools, typically employed for purposes of planning and zoning, offer libraries a detailed dissection of a neighborhood's demographics, including education level, family composition and transit information.

Once libraries have this profile defined, they can assess how their services align with the community's needs. One tool to assist in this effort is...

This is an excerpt from an article that appeared in Governing magazine. [Read the full piece.](#)

Facilities Master Planning: Key Considerations

A Facilities Master Plan is an expression of an institution's intentions to address its forecasted needs across a portfolio of assets. When done correctly, it sets political will into motion and allows a community to rally behind it. In short, it builds community.



Developing a Facilities Master Plan—whether for a municipality or more specifically a school district or library system—is a multistep process.

Although arduous, a thorough preparation strategy will increase organizational efficiency and a well-thought-out approach will increase effectiveness.

Overall the plan should include:

- A framework of principles and strategies to guide the overall process
- Analysis and synthesis of supporting data into project recommendations and strategies
- A methodology for prioritizing and sequencing projects
- A process for regular updates to reflect changes in goals, needs, and underlying assumptions

As your organization embarks on the effort, here are some best practices to consider:

1. **Accomplishing the appropriate preceding and related activities.** Complete your strategic and operational planning, then organize and review related data and policies. An organization should 'audit' itself for these key pieces and the readiness to address those that may not yet exist.
2. **Assembling and organizing the appropriate internal and external team and resources.** Establish who is responsible for making decisions and acting as project manager. Consider staff capacity beyond their "day jobs" and identify the extent of consultant support needed. Committees are good vehicles to review recommendations and allow staff to gain subject matter expertise and champion the effort to a variety of stakeholders. The more staff that are activated as part of the effort, the faster the rate of overall buy-in.
3. **Developing a clear understanding of what type of recommendations the Facilities Master Plan should and should not include.** One of the most important precedent activities is defining the scope and level of detail that will be included. Facilities Master Plans cannot solve everything. Having an understanding will help manage expectations along the way. Also recognize that plans are 'living' documents that must be regularly updated.

In sum: Facilities Master Plans grounded in the concept of setting up decision-making frameworks will live past the plan's publication date.

B&D has completed several successful municipal Facilities Master Plan efforts and has guided clients through capital improvement planning. If you have questions or would like to discuss, [please contact me](#).

Northern Virginia's George Mason High School: A 21st Century School, Creative Financing Alternatives, And Transparent Community Engagement

Deisy Brangman

George Mason High School (GMHS) is the only public high school serving the City of Falls Church, Virginia. Constructed between the 1950s and 1990s, the sprawling building no longer meets the needs of the community. Falls Church City Public Schools (FCCPS) sought a 21st century learning facility that accommodated the projected enrollment growth (845 to 1500 in 30 years) of their [US News top-ranked school](#). After decades of community advocacy, in November 2017, residents approved a \$120M bond for the



construction of a new high school. Since May 2018, B&D has been serving as the Owner's Representative, advising FCCPS on the procurement, design, and construction of the future Heart of the City.

B&D, in collaboration with FCCPS and the Gilbane / Stantec design-build team, has advised the development of a flexible design that looks ahead 30 years and can adapt to changes in enrollment as well as pedagogy. What cutting-edge spaces are needed today? What might education look like down the line—and how do you prepare for a future you can't predict? The design includes an innovative structural grid that will allow expansion and contraction of spaces as needed as well as contemporary concepts like collaboration areas, maker spaces, fabrication and variable intensity learning labs, and flexible learning studios.

Sustainability has also been key. The 5- to 7-story building will be LEED Gold Certified and Net Zero Energy-ready. B&D is aiding FCCPS in the procurement (and associated design collaboration and review) of a power purchase agreement (PPA), for the installation of photovoltaic (PV) panels at no cost to FCCPS and the City, with the long-term goal of net zero draw from the power grid—and possibly *contributing back*.

APPA is one of multiple project funding sources contemplated to be utilized. Preceding the 2017 bond referendum, the City explored a traditional public-private partnership for the project, but the financials could not fund 100% of the new school's construction cost. The City then pursued and is currently engaged in an economic development partnership that is proposed to have a private developer build out ~10 acres of the site with hotel, residential, office, and retail use mix. The land lease proceeds will help pay back a portion of the \$120M bond, reducing the future tax burden on City residents.

The success of the design's development is directly attributed to notable community engagement. The project team has held 250+ meetings with teachers, students, staff, community members, and FCCPS and City leaders. Every question and comment submitted (over 600... and counting!) has been recorded and responded to publicly.

This inspiring and unique project is already getting national attention. At the recent Association for Learning Environment's (A4LE) School Safety and Security Symposium in Dallas, FCCPS, Stantec, and B&D discussed how the design balanced strategic zoning and security measures with a modern open learning environment. [View the presentation.](#)

To learn more about the project, you can also [visit FCCPS's site](#) detailing the process or [watch this video](#) of the May 14th Falls Church School Board Special Meeting and Work Session.

What Has B&D Been Up To Recently?

We've been busy! Of course, we've been attending conferences—presenting, hosting, and engaging with the community. **Ty Taylor** and **Emily Rae** presented at A4LE's Southwest Regional Conference, where Emily was recognized with a Services Citation for her planning efforts and volunteer time planning the conference, and Ty—who chaired the conference—was recognized with a "Distinguished Services Award." Meanwhile, **Jenny Derry** paneled at Groundbreaking Women in Construction, talking about "Life in the Owner's Seat." Want to join us at a conference? You'll find **Beth Penfield** and **Kayla Anthony** at the [American Library Association \(ALA\) conference](#) later this month in DC.



Another form of engaging and giving back has been volunteering and mentoring. Many B&Ders are ACE Mentors—ACE as in architecture, construction, and engineering—including **Sarah Pearlstein**, **Greg Benson**, **Diego Martinez**, and **Michael Gadsden**. The [Washington DC Affiliate of ACE Mentoring](#) just wrapped up a successful year giving out 16 scholarships totaling over \$60,000 for students heading into our industry.

We've also been writing—**Shilpa Khatri** was featured in *Construction Today* talking about her work on charter schools, B&D's work more generally, and B&D's culture.

And we've been hiring! Among other exciting new additions to the team, we welcomed **Stephen Kitterman**. Stephen is a new Senior Project Manager in the DC office managing stabilization programs for DC Public Schools. In his previous work at the Architect of the Capitol, he represented the House Office Buildings in the planning, design, and construction of projects such as the Cannon House Renewal. In a previous position, he also partnered with B&D on projects such as the \$3.6B DC Public Schools Modernization Program and the Nationals Ballpark.

Finally, we've been celebrating progress on projects. The **Fields at RFK**—which is phase one of a project that will redevelop an outmoded stadium site into a bustling campus—has a ribbon cutting on June 8th; [please join us at the event!](#)

*B&D has three newsletters (Higher Education, Public Sector, and Venues).
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