What Is the Library of Virginia?

- State Library and Archives
  - One of the oldest agencies of Virginia government, founded in 1823 “to preserve and provide access to the state’s incomparable printed and manuscript holdings … the most comprehensive resource in the world for the study of Virginia history, culture, and government.”

- Current building – 1997
- Downtown Richmond / Capitol Square
- 200,000 visits/year
- Approx. 210 FTE*
What Do We Provide?

- Collections
  - Virginia, Southern, US history; Virginia authors (some circulate)

- Service Points
  - Welcome Desk (1st floor)
  - Circulation, Archives Reference, Manuscripts, Microfilm, Library Reference & Government Documents (combined 1/1/09), (2nd floor)
  - Special Collections ("2M")

- Miscellaneous – Virginia Shop, café, book talks & lectures

Who Do We Serve?

- Governor (and staff)
- Legislature
- State agency employees
- Diverse constituency of individuals
  - researchers, genealogists, students, architects, diners, shoppers… people seeking a quiet place

Areas of Concern

- Facility – what does the physical layout communicate?
- Services – do our visitors know what we offer?

- What obstacles exist for the visitor?
- What improvements would we like to see?
  - What can we afford?

Why Ask?

- We are a CUSTOMER SERVICE ORGANIZATION specialized in historic literature, historic documents, and history in the making.

- All “library functions” are in support of this principle (e.g., cataloging, preservation, reference).
Project Background & Methodology

- Began fall 2007
- Conducted by management-consultant volunteer (Project Director)
- Focus groups & individual interviews
  - External Participants (15)
  - Internal Participants (21)
  - Leadership participants (6)
- Visits to other libraries and cultural institutions

Visitor Experience Committee

- Formed in March 2008
- 10 staff members from throughout Library + 2 co-chairs
- Email distribution list created for additional staff feedback
- Reviewed and addressed *ALL* findings and recommendations from the study
- VEC report to Executive Management Team (8/31/08)
- EMT review continues today

Delivering the Project Findings (spring 2008)

- Presentations by Project Director (PD) to Library Foundation, Library Board, Executive Management, Managers/Supervisors
- Presentations (by me) to all interested staff
- Original Project Report (with findings and recommendations) mounted on Library Intranet
- PD sent letter on progress to participants (early summer 2008)

We Learned what People Think about…

- Getting to the Library
- Getting INTO the Library
- Navigating the building
- Finding and using the services
- General observations
Perceived Strengths

- Beauty and inspirational style of building
- Free parking
- Operating hours
- Cleanliness
- Spacious versatile first floor
- Virginia Shop
- Café
- Knowledgeable staff
- Comprehensive collections

Perceived Weaknesses

- Intimidating spaces
- Inadequate signage
- Navigational difficulties
- Hidden assets
- Visitors’ reluctance to ask for help

Main Issues to Address

- Navigation (to and into building)
- Signage additions/improvements
- General information, especially for first time users
- Customer relations/service
- Marketing/visibility
- Miscellaneous questions/suggestions

Tangible Results, to date...

- New maps to first and second floors
- More visibility for exhibitions and events
- Temporary directional signage throughout building
  - More visible “emergency exit” signs (reduced alarms going off)
- Opening up space near reference desks and in Virginia Authors Room
- A new “welcome” packet and revised “code of conduct” underway
- Plans for a “learning lab” for children underway
Getting to the Library….

- Directional signs needed on expressways and downtown streets
- Library identification not visible from a distance
- Signage should be larger/brighter, and frequently changed
- Display windows get little notice

Still more could be done….

Garage

- Not identified
- Confusing signage
- Not run by the Library
Important but Invisible!

• Front desk
• Coming events
• Conference rooms
• Virginia Shop
• Café
• Exhibitions in gallery (located at rear of first floor)
• Restrooms/elevator
Café

Technology Training Room

Improvements to date…
Second Floor
Multiple service points for information and research

…new services as of January 2009

• Computer classes (Word, etc.)
• Assistance with job applications & filing for unemployment

• Confusion coming off elevator
• Excessive “Do Not Enter” doors/areas and alarms
• Restrooms hard to find
Circulation

- Change name?
- Revise “patron code of conduct” – too many “rules”
- Books can be taken out?

Hard to Find the Reading Rooms

Signage difficult to read

Hard to see the Reference Desk from a distance…

… not much better from close up.
possibilities for signage near all the “reference” desks on 2nd floor

Barriers in front of desk have been removed.

Reading Room near Map Reference
Large, green chairs replaced with “Supreme Court” chairs.

Expand Map Reference area?
- increasing usage of maps
- key component of our collections

Map Reference Desk behind case – still needs more visibility

Push map cases back to allow for additional tables

add signage to map cases
Archives Research Room

- A “special collection” in an open area
- Add signage for “rules” of use on something visible from outside the room?

Archives Reference

Smaller chairs in front of desk – less “barrier” to the staff.

“grey on grey” signs: replace all

Virginia Authors Room

- What’s in here?
- Hidden behind Circulation
- Poor exterior signage
- Underutilized and under-advertised
- Lost opportunity to cultivate VA authors
Virginia Authors Room
Replaced chairs.
Easier to use space for events.

Hidden Asset: Special Collections
- Staff escort required to “2M” (secured floor)
- More limited hours (staffing issue/demand)

Still need to better advertise space or re-vision purpose of room.
Consider relocating to another area?

 OBSERVATIONS/CONCLUSIONS

- (Small) size of focus groups must be taken into account
- Agreed with almost all signage issues
- Agreed with need to address customer service
- Disagreed with future of café
- Disagreed with future of exhibitions

Biggest Lesson Learned:
Don’t Assume People Know What You Do!
Unintended (Positive) Consequences…

• Heightened awareness of staff

• Noticeable impact from small changes

• Request (from staff) to “study” our off-site facility (State Records Center)

• Review of space devoted to Maps

• Creation of virtual suggestion box for staff (still need to publicize more)
  – Have print suggestion forms for public…. Consider online?

Next Steps

• Recommend hiring design firm to address major signage issues

• Recommend providing customer service training for all Library staff

• Follow up with more “visitors”??

• Development of “Learning Lab”
The SunTrust Learning Lab

Opportunity

- Several possible locations identified by Visitor Experience Project
- Strong demand for primary source based educational materials
- Expanding our audience
- SunTrust seed money secured and other possible funding sources identified

Meeting a Need

- No current dedicated location for K-12 programs
- Reaching our future patrons/supporters
- Fulfilling our broad educational mission

Developing the concept

- Library-wide committee to review and develop proposal (4/08)
- Site visits to NARA Learning Lab (8/08)

Planning Phase

- Interviews and LVA site visit with selected design firms
- Follow-up discussions with design firms’ clients
- Visits to installations by design firms
- Selection of firm Quatrefoil
- Design charette (11/08)
Implementation Begins

- Review of underutilized space
- Proposed use of B-1 space – currently a non-public floor
Estimated Costs – Funding Possibilities

- Approx. $425,000
  - Fundraising from Private Sources
  - "Bricks & Mortar" Grant Opportunities
    - Parsons, Cabell, Morgan & Gwathmey
  - Individual and Corporate Opportunities

- Current funding for Programmatic Elements
  - "Shaping the Constitution" - $30,000
  - Children’s Book - $25,000

Staffing

- Creation of Docent Program
  - Launching May 2009
  - Partnership with University of Richmond’s School of Continuing Studies and Osher Institute

Project Timeline

- Installation
  - February – March 2010
- Program Evaluation
  - Spring and Summer 2010
- Official Launch
  - Fall 2010

Questions, Comments?

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