

**League of Women Voters, Merced County
Merced County Library Position**

Adopted May 2009

PREAMBLE

WHY LIBRARIES MATTER

A Public Library is a portal through which we access information that has accreted through the centuries of our civilization. In a society such as ours, it creates opportunities to enrich the lives of its citizens. In its repositories of fact and fiction, including history, the sciences, fine arts, the performing arts and other venues, it offers opportunities for study, for pleasure and for profit.

Why are libraries important? Here are a few solid reasons:

1. **LIBRARIES INFORM CITIZENS.** Libraries stand for democracy, for open, uncensored information and discussion and as a defense against the pressures of partisan interests. We believe communities demonstrate their dedication to knowledge, truth, justice, and culture by the vitality of their libraries.
2. **LIBRARIES OPEN MINDS.** Our libraries have the resources to let imaginations soar. Our libraries have something to help everyone and something to challenge everyone. Our libraries don't make judgments—they just supply the raw materials and the vehicles for making things happen—and all the help you need along the way.
3. **LIBRARIES LEVEL THE PLAYING FIELD.** Our citizens have differing levels of education and income. Our library provides free programs and materials to enhance knowledge and vocational skills, which provide opportunities for both intellectual and economic advancement. Research shows that the primary indicator of success in school and life is early and abundant access to books. Where but at the public library is such access free to everyone, rich or poor? We all talk about the necessity of lifelong learning—our public library provides the opportunity.
4. **LIBRARIES BREAK DOWN BARRIERS.** Anyone in our county—at any level of literacy in English or other languages, mobile or not, disabled or not—can get everything the library has to offer—and can get it free.

5. LIBRARIES BUILD COMMUNITIES. Every library is an extension of the community it serves, linking people with information, with each other, with the past, the present and with the future.
6. LIBRARIES ARE FAMILY VALUES IN ACTION. Does your family need new skills? Libraries have something for that. Kids need responsibility? Get them a library card and watch them live up to its use. Need a place to do and get help with homework, learn parenting skills, do research and reading in the summer? Hang out at the library. Want a place to help your children learn the value of knowledge and lifelong learning? Come with them to the library.
7. LIBRARIES PRESERVE THE PAST. Our lives are built on the shoulders of those who went before us. They made discoveries and may have made mistakes. But, they had ideas. And they left a record for us to use in moving forward.
8. LIBRARIES ARE SAFE HAVENS. A library is peaceful and reflective. A library is safe. You are treated with respect, and your ideas are honored. You can nourish yourself, your mind and your soul.
9. ILLITERACY IS EXPENSIVE AND WASTEFUL. There are few jobs in our society for people who cannot read. Illiteracy has resulted in unemployable people who are supported by and have become a drain upon society's resources. Welfare and health services have become severely burdened, a problem exacerbated by the inability of illiterate recipients to follow written guidelines and prescriptions. With little economic opportunity, illiteracy can lead to anti-social and criminal acts. We know the cost of housing prisoners is overwhelming. The US Department of Education has found that 85 percent of juvenile offenders have reading problems and 60 percent of American prison inmates are illiterate. Our libraries provide a pathway to economic opportunity and positive social behavior.

10. LIBRARIES ARE AN INVESTMENT IN THE FUTURE.

- Public libraries make good economic sense. The public library is one of the main attractions for new companies and employees and is part of the economic development package presented as “quality of life” in a community.
- Public libraries make good resources for local entrepreneurs. Small (and large) businesses use public libraries as resources for developing their own companies. The Gallo Winery founders got their start-up information from the public library!
- Public libraries make good community sense. In a culture preaching “lifelong learning” as a key to success at all levels, public libraries are where lifelong learning actually happens!

Access to free public libraries—during hours and at locations convenient for families with small children, for elementary, high school and college students, for people in and out of the work force and retired folks--has always been a hallmark of American democracy. Rather than neglecting our public libraries when we know they are critically needed, we need to actively support our public libraries—Merced’s library system--into the 21st century.

Library Study Position Statement

Position in Brief: The League of Women Voters of Merced County supports an adequately staffed and funded Merced County Library System that provides educational, recreational and cultural opportunities to all segments of the population in all library service areas.

Facilities

1. The Merced County Library System should conduct a study to determine appropriate locations and number of branches as well as alternative methods of providing countywide library services. This study, which should be updated on a periodic basis, should consider:
 - Current usage levels
 - Community and rural populations' access to library facilities
 - Number of branches the System can support while providing quality services
 - Feasibility and sustainability of implementing a bookmobile service and how a bookmobile service would improve extension of services
2. The County of Merced must ensure independent access for people with disabilities at all Merced County Library branches as covered in the Americans with Disabilities Act. Independent access must be available at entrances and in public service areas, stacks and bathrooms.

Staff

3. Education requirements should be established for all levels of library staff and should be reflected in job descriptions.
4. The Merced County Library System should ensure that it maintains a well-trained staff and contemporary library services by providing for a base level of funding for ongoing staff training.

5. The Merced County Library System should develop a standard of staffing appropriate to each branch library's size and service population. Standards should include:
 - Appropriate staff, i.e. professional librarians, library assistants, library technicians, shelvers and volunteers
 - Staff time that allows for performance of non-public service responsibilities such as opening and closing procedures

Services

6. The Merced County Library System should provide a literacy program with partners in order to assure sustainability.
7. The Merced County Library should provide services for young adults which should include teen programs, teen spaces and materials of interest to young adults.
8. The Merced County Library System should develop and implement an outreach and public relations strategy with the support of the County Public Information Officer.
9. The Merced County Library System should develop minimum standards for all library branches including days, open, hours, programs and services offered.

Materials

10. Membership in a library network should augment, not supplant, funding for library services and materials.
11. Every branch should have a collection useful to the members of its community and large enough to meet local information and reading needs.
12. A policy should be developed and procedures delineated for evaluating and culling outdated material. It should include identifying professional staffing needs to properly evaluate materials.
13. The Merced County Library System should have an adequate budget for replacement of lost and outdated materials.

14. While a standard collection should be complete for the whole library system, consideration should also be given to purchasing library materials targeted to the population served by a branch.
15. All branches should have a variety of subscriptions that are relevant to the individual community.

Community Support

16. The Merced County Board of Supervisors should be encouraged to consider a geographically balanced representation of Library Advisory Commissioners within each supervisorial district.

Funding

17. The County of Merced should create a multi-year Strategic Planning document, including funding and budget considerations, for the Merced County Library System that would include annual benchmarks to bring the Merced County Library System to a point where it provides a full range of library services throughout the county. A Strategic Plan should be coordinated with a Capital Planning Study.
18. Library funds from all sources should be tracked in order to assure accountability.
19. The County of Merced should begin work immediately to ensure continuance of the library services portion of the Property Tax Sharing Agreement between the City of Merced and the County of Merced and/or institute a plan for replacing the substantial support provided by the agreement.
20. The County of Merced should be encouraged to solicit funding from the governments of the 5 incorporated cities in order to meet a standard level of services and materials including periodical and newspaper subscriptions and hours of service.

Capital Funding / Facility Planning

21. The County of Merced should invest in a County Library Capital Planning and Facility Study conducted by state and/or national consultants to identify county library facility needs in incremental stages for the next 25 years. Capital facility planning should be coordinated with strategic planning so that operations funding is assured in new and/or expanded facilities.