Black Gold Cooperative
Library System Strategic Plan
October 2012 to September 2015

August 2012
San Luis Obispo, California
Message from the Executive Director

Dear Reader:

In July 2012, the members of the Black Gold Cooperative underwent a strategic planning process to chart a path for the next three years. A two-day conference was held to gather ideas and solicit input from library supporters in San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara and Ventura counties. The theme of the conference was “Black Gold: New Approaches for Changing Times.” We very much appreciate the thoughtful and sincere input of those stakeholders attending the meeting; the feedback they gave was invaluable in helping to craft this plan and decide the top library priorities for the cooperative members.

By the end of the conference, three goals had been agreed upon:

- Provide equitable access to materials and technology,
- Ensure members consistently fulfill membership responsibilities,
- Sustain a strong and viable administrative structure.

We have created a number of objectives specifically designed to help achieve these goals and have already begun the first steps in their implementation. We are very excited at the prospect of evaluating our services and delivering the best library service possible to residents of our beautiful region.

Regards,

Maureen Theobald
Executive Director
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About the Black Gold Cooperative Library System

History and Description
Founded in 1964, the Black Gold Cooperative Library System was formed for the purpose of increasing the quality and quantity of library services through shared resources. The California Public Library Act legislation in 1963 provided financial incentives to libraries to combine into library systems for the exchange of information, materials, and services. Initially, all the public libraries in the counties of Kern, Ventura, Santa Barbara, and San Luis Obispo met to create a union-printed catalog and to enable all of the libraries in the area to have access to each other’s printed materials. Ultimately Kern County decided not to participate in Black Gold and instead became its own system. Libraries in Paso Robles and Oxnard joined in 1974.

The first Black Gold Union catalog was in book form and contained 11,000 titles. In addition to the shared list of materials, Black Gold services included delivery to the other members. A delivery van called the Pony Express was purchased in 1964. Requests were sent by an internal teletype system set up for that purpose. A film-circuit program was begun with films borrowed from the Canadian Film Service. A Processing Center provided centralized purchasing and cataloging to the members, a smaller version of which remains today.

The California Library Services Act legislation in 1977 provided for grants and reimbursements to qualifying library systems. It provided funds for reference, communication and delivery and for System Advisory Boards. An Information Center established in Santa Barbara was created to provide reference service to libraries that could not provide that service themselves.

Many changes have taken place over the last 48 years, with services being eliminated as necessary and others added. The first contract for a computerized circulation system began operation in 1985, providing check-out and check-in services, automated overdues and interlibrary loan services. Headquarters moved several times, most recently in 2004 from Ventura to San Luis Obispo, when three offices were combined.

Today, Black Gold is one of seven remaining cooperative library systems in California. The hallmark of Black Gold remains the shared catalog, now available on the Internet with 1,220,000 unique titles, and delivery service. Patrons in the region can use the catalog to view all libraries’ holdings and to request items from any other library to be delivered to the patron’s home library, often within a day or two. The delivery service makes trips to main libraries and Black Gold headquarters three days a week. In addition to transporting items borrowed by patrons, the service also delivers newly processed library materials, correspondence, and other information among members.
The Cooperative has also established a strong collection of eBooks and audiobooks. Over 12,000 titles are available for patrons to download at their convenience with more added monthly. Overall circulation of these titles has doubled each year since they were added in 2007 and demand continues to increase.

For almost 50 years, Black Gold has strived to remain relevant in the face of technological, cultural, and funding challenges. With an eye to continuing on for the next 50 years, its member libraries are working to continue to change with the times, while staying true to the original vision of providing shared resources for all their patrons.

Funding Sources

Black Gold Funding Sources 2010 to 2011

Black Gold Funding Sources 2012 to 2013

Black Gold Funding Sources 2013 to 2014 (anticipated)
Demographics (2010 Total Area Population: 722,753)

Service Area by Age

- 5 and under: 12%
- 18 and under: 6%
- 19-64: 23%
- 65 and over: 59%

Service Area by Ethnicity

- American Indian & Alaska native: 1%
- Asian: 3%
- Black: 46%
- Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander: 2%
- Hispanic or Latino origin: 48%
- White not Hispanic: 0%

Note: Hispanics may be of any race so are included in applicable race categories.
Summary

Overview
On July 11-12, 2012, the Black Gold Cooperative Library System convened a two-day strategic planning conference at the Santa Ynez Valley Marriott, Buellton, California. The purpose was to develop the Black Gold Strategic Plan for the period October 2012 to September 2015.

July 11, 2012 - Assess the Current State
This first day included 23 stakeholders representing the six Black Gold member libraries and select members of the Black Gold staff. (See Conference Stakeholders at Appendix A). The stakeholders acknowledged the external trends and forces impacting Black Gold, assessed the strengths and weaknesses, identified the key strategic issues, developed the framework for strategic focus areas, and recommended mission and vision statements.

July 12, 2012 - Chart the Future Direction
The second day included the leaders of the six member libraries and the Black Gold executive director. These leaders used the first day’s input to develop planning assumptions, to finalize the mission and vision statements, to validate the strategic focus areas, and to develop goals and objectives for each strategic focus area.

The Current State
Black Gold is experiencing a significant reduction in resources from all sources, mainly, a 25% reduction from the state. During this period of diminishing resources, the relevancy of libraries, in light of the Internet and Google, is being challenged. The services provided by Black Gold are important and of value to both library patrons and to the Black Gold member libraries, e.g., sharing of materials. However, in general, local political leaders (funders) may not fully realize or understand the value added to the community by a strong library system. In addition, the increased demand for digital content and the technologies that support the content presents new challenges such as long waiting lists for materials, quality and quantity of materials, and a cumbersome interface to access the materials.

Strategic Focus Areas
Strategic focus areas represent the framework for the three goals and 11 objectives that serve as a roadmap for Black Gold over the next three years. The strategic focus areas are:
- Services
- Membership
- Governance
Planning Assumptions

Planning assumptions are predictions about the future operating environment. Following are the planning assumptions for this strategic plan.

- Funding from the state is not adequate and dependable.
- Member libraries’ budgets will either decrease or remain flat.
- Thirty to fifty percent of member library leaders will retire.
- Demand for current digital and technological services will increase.
- The gap between “haves” and “have not’s” will continue to increase.
- Polaris (vendor) will continue providing Integrated Library System services.

Vision and Mission

Mission
Black Gold Cooperative Library System provides cost-effective resource sharing and support, thus enabling member libraries to deliver optimal services to their respective communities.

Vision
Black Gold member libraries: Collaboratively achieving our highest potential.

Goals and Objectives

Services
Goal 1: Provide equitable access to materials and technology.

Objective 1.1: By November 2012, based on results of cataloging audit, begin implementation of process improvements to make cataloging unit more efficient and effective: e.g., backlog, turn-around time, level of detail, and responsiveness to library staff.

Objective 1.2: Beginning July 2013, annually increase funding of digital selectable selections by 20 percent.
Objective 1.3: By July 2013, examine individual jurisdiction budgets to determine the actual amount of materials budget used for shareable materials to encourage parity among members.

Objective 1.4: By September 2013, examine options and make a decision for continuing or changing the hold fee.

Objective 1.5: By May 2014, a committee of library members explores and presents to the council low-cost or no-cost options to promote member library services.

Membership

Goal 2: Ensure members consistently fulfill membership responsibilities.

Objective 2.1: By April 2013, and annually thereafter, the council examines the contribution formula and decides what changes, if any, are needed.

Objective 2.2: By August 2012, 90% of committee members participate in and contribute to scheduled committee meetings and functions or make alternative arrangements with Black Gold in a timely manner.

Objective 2.3: By December 2012, establish and communicate a process for enforcing infractions of existing policies and procedures.

Governance

Goal 3: Sustain a strong and viable administrative structure.

Objective 3.1: By March 2014, validate or revise the purposes, structures, memberships, and scheduling of Black Gold committees (standing or ad-hoc).

Objective 3.2: By October 2012, establish a three-year consensus budget projection that addresses budget gaps and use of reserves.

Objective 3.3: By March 2013, examine options and by July 2013 make a consensus decision concerning proportional representation.
Appendix A

Conference Stakeholders

Lompoc
Ashlee Chavez, Adult Services Manager, Lompoc Public Library
Judith Dale, Lompoc Library Trustee & County of Santa Barbara Library Advisory Committee
Molly Gerald, Director, Lompoc Public Library

Paso Robles
Sue Benitez, Treasurer, Friends of the Paso Robles Library
Karen Christiansen, Library Manager, Paso Robles City Library
Carol Singleton, Secretary, Paso Robles Library Foundation Board
Denise Surber, System Advisory Board

San Luis Obispo
Marci Cunningham, Library Manager, San Luis Obispo County Library
Geoff O’Quest, San Luis Obispo County Administrative Analyst
Rosalyn Pierini (Roz), Supervising Librarian, San Luis Obispo County Library
Brian Reynolds, Director, Santa Luis Obispo County Library
Vera Wallen, Foundation, San Luis Obispo County Library

Santa Barbara
Michele Allyn, President, Friends of the Santa Barbara Public Library
Carolyn Lawrence, President, Friends of the Library of Santa Ynez Valley
Scott Love, Library Services Manager, Santa Barbara Public Library
Irene Macias, Director, Santa Barbara Public Library

Santa Maria
John Corbett, Principal Librarian, Santa Maria Public Library
Joyce Hall, President, Friends of the Santa Maria Public Library
Mary Housel, City Librarian, Santa Maria Public Library
Wayne Peterson, President, Santa Maria Public Library Board of Trustees

Santa Paula
Dan Robles, District Librarian, Blanchard-Santa Paula Library District

Black Gold
Kim Hunter, System Administrator, Black Gold Cooperative
Appendix B

Map of Service Areas

California Library Services Act Systems

48-59 Library System
BLACK GOLD Library System
INLAND Library System
NorthNet Library System
Pacific Library Partnership
San Joaquin Valley Library System
SERRA Library System
Southern California Library Cooperative
Non-affiliated
Appendix B
Map of Service Areas
Strategic Plan: October 2012 to September 2015

Point of Contact
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