

When Opportunity Knocks: King County Law Library's Remodeling Project

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From March 2003 through September 2004, the Seattle branch of King County Library (KCLL) was located in temporary spaces while the King County courthouse underwent a major structural retrofit. The primary purpose of the retrofit was to install seismic bracing but the building's HVAC, fire detection and suppression, lighting, power and telecommunications systems were also improved. The scope of our portion of the project actually included planning for moving the Library to temporary spaces, operating it in those spaces for more than a year, and returning it to our remodeled space.

The Library's space was impacted directly by the building's retrofit in several ways. The installation of seismic bracing changed the shape of all of our public conference rooms, enlarged all of our central columns and added new walls in some places. Aisles and other areas that were not ADA-compliant prior to the project were required to be so upon return. Installation of the fire detection and suppression system lowered the ceiling in several areas, ultimately preventing us from using any of the top shelves in our main stack areas.

Although the courthouse retrofit was not a project of our invention, we did use it as an opportunity to make much-needed improvements. We established a Move Team whose job it was to manage all aspects of the project and act as a liaison with the County. It was comprised of the Library Director, the Patron Access Services Librarian and the Technical Services Librarian. The Team met frequently with the County and dealt with a number of changes to the scope and direction of the project. The Team also organized meetings with the library staff to discuss the project and gather their input about design and space planning issues. One of the most enjoyable aspects of the project was our work with professional space planner Andrea Vanecko from Callison Architecture. Andrea volunteered her time to meet with the staff and talk about the space planning process. She guided us through discussions of who we are, who our patrons are and how we best serve their needs. The staff toured the showroom facilities at Callison to see examples of furniture and room arrangements and Andrea prepared concept drawings for us to suggest how we might best remodel our reference service counter and our public seating areas.

Funding was a critical issue during the entire process. Already faced with a deficit budget for regular operations, we had to be very creative in the way that we financed any improvements. In a few instances we were able to lobby successfully for the County to pay but a majority of the expenses were paid for through a capital campaign called the 85th Anniversary Campaign. The 85th Anniversary Campaign was KCLL's first major non-statutory funding-raising effort and through it we raised over \$55,000.

The remodeling project touched all aspects of our operations. The improvements of which we are most proud include:

- ❖ a new reference/circulation service area
- ❖ new carrels for our public computers
- ❖ new quiet study areas with comfortable lounge chairs
- ❖ public Wi-Fi capability
- ❖ better-organized open stack areas with ADA-compliant aisles
- ❖ public art throughout the library
- ❖ new staff lunchroom
- ❖ improved network equipment room