

LIBRARY DESIGN STANDARDS

CONTRA COSTA COUNTY LIBRARY

28 OCTOBER 2024



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CONTRA COSTA LIBRARY DESIGN STANDARDS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document is designed to provide guidance and general standards to cities and towns whose libraries are a branch of the Contra Costa County Library (the “Library”). The aim is to provide clarity regarding minimum standards of quality and durability for library buildings as well as standards for consistency across the Library system. These standards will help library staff provide superior service and reduce the number of required replacements of furniture and finishes over time—a prudent, cost-effective strategy as well as a sustainable approach.

Libraries are some of the hardest-working buildings in our communities, open to all ages, abilities, and backgrounds. The Library’s goal is to provide equitable, high-quality service to all patrons, and these design standards will help to make library buildings safer, cleaner, and ultimately more welcoming for all. Once built, library facilities often remain in service for many years before updates are made, so making effective design choices that will last long-term is key.

These guidelines are divided into a number of categories, highlighting furniture and shelving as particular topics but also addressing staff work areas, lighting, acoustics, and access.

Each community and building has unique challenges that will require our partner cities and towns, designers, and architects to continue the dialogue with the Library as project work progresses. Our shared goal is to create an inspiring building for the public that will operate effectively and efficiently as a facility and last for decades to come.

1. GENERAL DESIGN STANDARDS

Building Size & Configuration

- Single-story building layouts are strongly preferred by the Library, allowing for better staff efficiency, visibility and ease of operation.

Parking

- Provide bike and scooter parking in compliance with local ordinance. Consult City officials and library staff on location and number of bike racks.
- Provide car parking in compliance with local ordinance. Parking areas should include dedicated, free parking for library patrons and staff within one block of the library. If paid metered parking is necessary, include some free, short-term spots for quick library visits, and free spots for library staff adjacent to the library facility.

Safety & Security

- One public entrance is recommended to control access to the building.
- Visibility for patrons and staff should be prioritized. This can be achieved by maximizing sightlines throughout (using open, connected spaces and glass), and by minimizing hidden corners.
- A clear path of travel is required to meet all ADA guidelines.
- Provide a security alarm system for the building.
- Provide security cameras (indoor and outdoor), and discuss their locations with library staff.
- Refer to 2. Public Spaces—Staff Service Points for additional information.

Acoustics

- **Meeting rooms.** It is important to create acoustic separation between meeting rooms and larger library spaces. Attention should be paid to creating walls that extend beyond the ceiling to the underside of the structure and to sound gasketing at doors. In addition, sound attenuation can be achieved through a combination of acoustic ceilings and wall finishes. For example, an acoustic ceiling tile used in combination with fabric-wrapped wall panels is an effective way to create better meeting room acoustics.

- **Open library reading rooms.** Each library reading room should be designed with acoustics in mind and considered on a case-by-case basis, depending on the design of the building. Acoustically sound library reading rooms can be achieved through a combination of acoustic ceiling treatments, acoustic wall paneling, and the use of carpeting. It is also important to create acoustic separation between loud library spaces and quiet ones. An example of a loud space might be the service/checkout area, whereas a quiet space might be the quiet reading room or periodicals area.
- **Children's/teen spaces.** Because it is not expected or desired that children's and teen spaces remain quiet, it is recommended that these spaces be acoustically separated from the quieter spaces in the library (such as the adult spaces or quiet reading rooms). Separation can be achieved through a building layout with no direct adjacency to quiet spaces, by using a wall as a space divider (with glass for visibility), and through the use of acoustic ceiling and wall treatments, carpeting, and soft furnishings.



Image of Danville Library reading area

Electrical Power & Lighting

- **Electrical and data access.** It is important that electrical and data access is abundant, through the use of in-floor raceway systems and/or floor outlets, as well as wall outlets. Electrical arrangements should allow for flexibility and rearrangement of layout. Data should be accessible at all desktop computers and staff workstations.
 1. Libraries should include exterior wifi access points. Access points should, at a minimum, cover any outdoor seating areas.
- **Power requirements.** It is recommended that each reader table in the adult and teen spaces have an in-surface power module. It is also recommended that at least 50% of the lounge seating in these areas have direct access to power (via a wall or floor outlet or mobile power module). Providing power access mounted in tables or lounge areas in children's areas is not recommended except at computer stations.
- **Backup power.** Back up power needs should be discussed with the project team along with the City on a case-by-case basis. For example, if the library is to act as a cooling or resiliency center, a generator may be required.
- **Lighting at shelving.** Lighting at shelving should be glare-free and uniform. Lighting should run across rather than parallel to the stacks, so that book faces (rather than the tops of the stacks) are illuminated. It is recommended that lighting not be attached to the shelving so that flexibility can be maintained should shelving configurations change in the future.
- For general lighting in main library areas, provide linear pendant indirect/direct lighting. In back-of-house areas, provide recessed can fixtures. All lights should be LED.

Views

- Views out on to green space should be prioritized as much as possible. However, certain areas such as the staff and children's areas should be taken into special consideration as views into the library from outside passerby may be unwanted. Explore options for operable windows in coordination with security needs and mechanical systems.

Finish Materials

- Interior materials should be selected for longevity.
 1. Tiled carpet should be used instead of broadloom/rolled goods. Carpet should be of high quality and patterned in darker tones for high durability. Carpet should be nylon fiber and solution dyed. All carpet tile should be approved for commercial use.
 2. Avoid using small tiles in restrooms, in order to minimize grout. Choose dark grout colors, especially for floors. Use porcelain tile on floors, and ceramic or porcelain tile on walls. Full-height wall tile is preferred, but at minimum, tile walls up to 4 feet.
 3. Materials in areas that are within the reach-range of patrons and that can be touched (the "touch zone") should be durable and/or easy to repair. For example, fabric-wrapped wall panels below 8 feet in height might need to be bleach cleanable for maintenance, whereas panels above this height may not need to be.
- Exterior building materials
 1. Architects should design a library building as a long-term civic investment, using high-quality, durable, low-maintenance materials. When selecting materials, consider maintenance and graffiti removal.
 2. Building materials should be thoughtfully selected to enhance the civic nature of the building and to fit within the community.

Sustainability Goals

- Sustainability is an important value that the Library wants to promote. Architects should work within sustainability requirements provided by the municipality and look to exceed those requirements wherever possible. Look for opportunities to incorporate public education into the use of sustainable features.

Accessibility Goals

- The Library should strive to go above and beyond building code and meet Universal design and accessibility standards. Universal design is defined as “a concept in which products and environments are designed to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaption or specialized design.” In the design and selection of every element, patrons of all ages, shapes, sizes, and abilities should be considered.

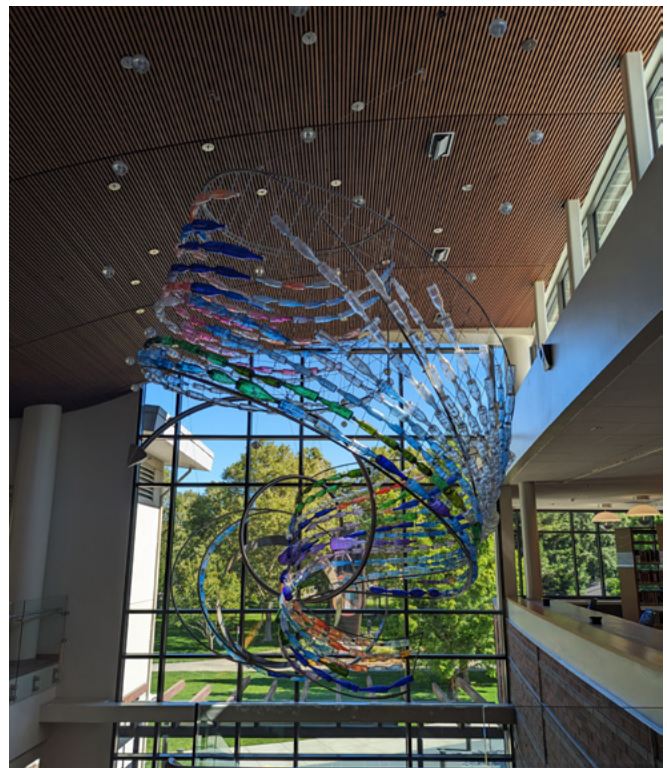
Signage

- Exterior signage
 1. Contra Costa County should be acknowledged on building signage. At a minimum, the county logo or county seal should be incorporated in any monument sign, or on the building.
 2. Changeable vinyl signage indicating library hours should be provided on glass at the building entry.
 3. A distinct sign mounted on the building should clearly mark the location of the book return.
 4. Provide clearly marked information for delivery people to contact staff when the building is closed.
- Interior building signage
 1. **Directional signage.** Provide wayfinding signage throughout larger branch libraries to demarcate self-service checkout, restrooms, etc. Signage indicating large program areas or rooms such as children’s or teen areas should be determined on a case-by-case basis. Such signage would be in addition to signage required by ADA.
 2. **Code-required signage.** Provide all signs required to meet ADA standards, exiting, fire codes, etc.
 3. **Collection signage.** Signage at stacks should be flexible and easily changeable by library staff, using standard (not specialty) fonts. Mount collection signage on shelves rather than walls. For example, large fixed wall signage calling out “Fiction” will limit the library’s ability to reconfigure shelving in the future.

4. Community information boards should be included in library projects to facilitate community collaboration and communication.
5. Placement of donor signs and installations must be reviewed with library staff to ensure they are located appropriately. These interventions are long-term and permanent and may impact future flexibility.

Public Art

- Public art displayed in both permanent and temporary exhibitions is a natural fit and welcome in libraries but should be thoughtfully selected.
- Art should be carefully selected to last over time. Large murals and installations must be vetted with library staff to ensure they are suitable for their spaces and are placed in zones where they will be safe from damage.
- Temporary changing art galleries and tackable areas for children’s art must be coordinated with library staff. Often these are left unmaintained if such coordination does not occur.



Public art installation at Walnut Creek Library

2. PUBLIC SPACES

Adult Reading Areas

- Where square footage allows, create a “quiet reading” area for adults who want to retreat from noise/activity. These areas should be acoustically separated and should not contain library supplied PCs.

Stacks

- Provide clearances between runs of shelving that at minimum meet ADA requirements. Provide more generous spacing where square footage allows.
- Refer to **Shelving and Electrical Power & Lighting** for additional guidance.

Children’s Spaces

- It is recommended that shelving heights in children’s spaces remain at 60 inches or under. Picture-book shelving especially should not exceed 48 inches.

- Table and chair heights should best serve the patrons who use them the most. It is recommended that two to three different seat and chair heights be provided to accommodate children of all ages and sizes. Refer to the chart below for age-based average table and chair heights.
- All upholstery in children’s spaces should be bleach cleanable and/or wipeable.
- Where space allows, include seating wide enough to accommodate a child and a caregiver, such as a small loveseat or sofa.
- Avoid:
 1. Sharp corners
 2. Climbing structures
 3. Toylike seating that can be thrown
 4. Stainless steel surfaces

| Age Category | Age (Approx.) | Table Height | Chair Seat Height |
|--------------|---------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| Toddler | 1-4 Years | 13"–17" 33 cm–43 cm | 6"–9" 15 cm–23 cm |
| Preschool | 3-6 Years | 18"–19" 46 cm–48 cm | 10"–11" 25 cm–28 cm |
| School Age | 6-13+ Years | 20"–30" 50 cm–76 cm | 12"–18" 30 cm–46 cm |

Age-based average table and chair heights.



Image of San Pablo Library children’s area



- **Manipulatives.** Where space allows in the children's area, it is recommended to include manipulatives. Manipulative play refers to learning with movement and problem solving through interaction with physical objects. Manipulatives can be as small and simple as panels on the ends of book stacks or as large and involved as custom-built structures that children can occupy. Library staff can recommend preferred and vetted vendors.
- **Computers.** Check with library staff to determine computer needs specific to the children's area.

Teen Spaces

- The teen space should be easily identifiable as its own space so that other patrons do not occupy the area. This can be achieved through physical separation (wall and door), clear signage, and/or different finishes and furniture. It must be easily visible from the staff service desk.
- The teen space should be physically and stylistically separate from the children's space. The style of the space may be playful and fresh, but it should not appear childlike and ideally is not immediately adjacent to the children's area.
- Furniture in the teen space should be easily reconfigurable and movable by the teens themselves. Offer a wider variety of seating arrangements for various sizes of groups and activities.
- It is recommended to provide a mix of lounge seating and tables with chairs.
- When selecting furniture and finishes, assume that teens will put their feet up on tables and chairs.

Staff Service Points

- Ensure there is adequate space at public service desks so two staff can navigate around each other. It is recommended that the desk have at least 3 feet, 6 inches of clear space behind it. In instances where the service point serves as a full-time workstation, each station should be a minimum of 4 feet wide. In instances where the service point is only a touchdown station, the width can be less. It is recommended that service points be 2 feet, 6 inches deep to create a comfortable distance between staff and patrons. Anything wider than that will create ergonomic issues for staff.
- The public service desk should be positioned so that staff will have a wall behind them, with two ways to exit from behind the desk. Exits can be swinging gates or open aisles.
 1. If a full-height wall behind the service desk is not feasible, provide a minimum 3-foot-high barrier such as a bookcase behind the desk. The goal is to create a barrier for staff so they are not approached from behind by the public.
- All workstations at service desks should have sit/stand capabilities for ergonomics.

Group Study Rooms

- Provide glass at the front of group study rooms so that staff can see inside. Provide a system for exterior locking of the rooms.
- In instances where group study rooms cannot be built-in or future flexibility is desired, consider pre-fabricated study pods.

Large Meeting/Multipurpose Rooms

- Meetings spaces available after library open hours must also have bathrooms that the public can use.
- Provide adequate storage for tables and chairs in a storeroom adjacent to the meeting room.
- Chairs must be lightweight, easily movable and stackable by staff. Include dollies for ease in moving chairs.
- Provide tables with wheels that fold and nest for storage.

Public Computers

- Public computer stations should be located near the public service desk in open areas within full view of staff rather than enclosed in a computer lab. Laptops can be used by patrons in enclosed rooms.
- It is recommended that each public computer station have a minimum width of 3 feet, 6 inches. Dividers between stations can be used to create a sense of privacy. Dividers should be lower than full height so that staff can easily see patrons. All surfaces including dividers should be wipeable
- Desktop computers are needed in each branch even if laptop checkout is available. Desktop computers are easier for older adults to use.
- ADA-accessible computer station(s) should be provided, typically at a motorized sit/stand table directly adjacent to the other computer stations.

Restrooms

- Provide a separate restroom for staff-only use in the staff area.
- Consider a single stall public restroom for all genders.
- Provide waste bins that are separate from the paper towel dispenser unit. Wall-mounted waste

receptacles are not of adequate size and will overflow.

- Locate paper towel dispensers adjacent to the sink rather than on an opposite wall to minimize water dripping onto the floor.
- Specify a folding stepstool at one lavatory to allow for children's handwashing. Provide family restrooms in the children's areas of all mid-size and larger branches.
- Provide a vending machine of free menstrual products at all public restrooms.

Outdoor Spaces

- Where space allows, it is recommended to provide outdoor space for patrons that is controlled, i.e., easily monitored and/or fully secured (fenced).
- Provide shade in outdoor areas.
- Outdoor furniture
 1. Furniture must be attached or heavily weighted if not in a controlled/lockable space.
 2. Provide a mix of seating most suitable for the space and its programming. For example, picnic tables are great for outdoor art classes whereas lounge seating is good for adult and senior reading.
 3. Provide furniture for children where appropriate.
 4. Provide for ADA accessibility.
 5. Consider operations: Will chairs need to be brought into the library by staff at night?
 6. Cushions are not advised on outdoor furniture.



Image of El Sobrante Library public computers

3. STAFF SPACES & LIBRARY OPERATIONS

Staff Entry & Shipping/Receiving Area

- All shipping and receiving areas should be easily accessible by trucks and have an accessible path for hand trucks. Additionally, a doorbell or other system should be provided to alert library staff when deliveries are made.
- The staff entry and shipping/receiving area should be separate from the public entry.
- Provide dedicated space for receiving deliveries and preparing outgoing shipments.
- Receiving area must be easily accessible to trucks.
- Areas should be well lit and placed to provide safe entry and exit after hours.
- Areas should be able to accommodate a large number of book bins and carts. Library staff should provide space needs for this.

Book Return

- Locate the book return to allow books to drop into the building.
- Provide in-wall exterior returns that are adjacent or easily accessible to parking.
- Do not use free-standing exterior book returns.
- The Contra Costa County Library does not use AMH (automatic materials handling) systems.
- Ensure that in-wall returns have adequate space on the staff side for a large, standard-sized bin to be placed below the book chute (an ergonomic issue). Consult with library staff to ensure that enough space is provided for the book return area. Ensure that bookdrops are lockable.



An example of adequate clearance not being provided for a bin below the book drop. A cushion was placed on the floor to receive the dropped books, which must be collected up by staff (an ergonomic issue).

Book Processing

- Provide adequate space and equipment for book processing in staff areas. This may entail space for book carts, a large worktable, chairs, and shelving.

Staff Workroom

- Provide sit/stand workstations
- Provide bulletin board space for staff at office areas.
- **Storage.** Work with library staff to determine staff storage needs.
- **Private Offices.** The Library Manager should have a private office. At minimum, provide sit/stand workstations, storage, and guest seating. Consult with library staff about specific needs.
- **Private Meeting Spaces.** Staff will need a private, enclosed space to take online meetings. This space should seat 1-4 people, depending on space available, and should be equipped with power, data and adequate ventilation.

Staff Support Spaces

- Staff Lounge
 1. Staff kitchenette should include countertops, cabinetry, refrigerator, microwave, sink, general storage, bulletin board space, and adequate space for recycling center.

2. Staff break room should include a table and chairs as well as comfortable lounge seating where space allows.

- Provide a private locker for each staff member.
- **Staff restroom.** See 2. Public Spaces—Restrooms.
- Provide a wellness/lactation room for staff. This room should include a lounge chair and ottoman or a recliner chair, a mini fridge, a side table, and electrical outlet access.

Friends of the Library

- The Friends of the Library bookstore should not exceed 3% of the total square footage of the Library. This percentage includes any associated storage and work areas.

Janitorial

- Provide designated storage space for janitorial supplies (supplies cannot be stored in mechanical/electrical rooms). Janitorial spaces should include a mop sink and shelving, and walls should be finished in FRP (fiberglass-reinforced paneling).
- Public programs that require food service need to comply with current Health Department requirements for preparing and cleaning up food.



Image of Lafayette Library staff breakroom

4. FURNITURE

Furniture Types

- Provide a mix of furniture types throughout the library.
- Lounge furniture
 1. Avoid furniture that allows patrons to lie down, such as sofas and long benches.
 2. Avoid throw pillows or loose cushions.
 3. Provide a mix of styles for a variety of ages, abilities, and sizes. Provide some lounge furniture with arms to support an upright seated position for older patrons. Chairs should have a minimum weight limit of 300 lbs.
- Tables
 1. Reader tables should be mainly 2- and 4-person tables.
 2. It is recommended that at least 30 inches of width be provided for each seat at the table to maintain comfortable personal space distances between patrons.
 3. Provide sit to stand tables as needed for ADA access.
- Chairs
 1. A mix of armchairs (30%) and armless chairs (70%) is recommended to support varying sizes and abilities of patrons. Chairs should be ergonomically comfortable to accommodate long periods of work or study. Chairs should be lightweight and easy for patrons to move.
 2. Reader chairs refer to non-lounge chairs that are generally paired with tables. They are fixed in height and do not have casters. Generally, they are wood.
 3. Computer chairs refer to non-lounge chairs that sit at tables with computers. They may have height adjustability and be on casters.

Minimum Standards for Warranties

- All furniture specified should come with a minimum 10-year warranty.

Replacement Schedule

- Furniture should be replaced on an as-needed basis depending on how heavily it is used, how

and where it is used, and cleaning protocol.

- In general, upholstered pieces that have a resilient textile with a backing, that are cleaned properly, and that are not exposed to food or drink regularly should be replaced or assessed for replacement after 10 years.
- Tables and chairs, especially wooden ones, can last a lifetime if cared for properly and serviced when broken. It is important to be diligent about warranties and non-obsolescence clauses when selecting furniture pieces, especially those that will be used for a lifetime.

Furniture Location

- Furniture should be movable by staff where possible.

Power Access

- It is recommended that every reader table in the adult and teen areas have an in-surface power module. It is also recommended that at least 50% of the lounge seating in these areas have direct access to power (via wall or floor outlet or mobile power module).

Fabrics & Finishes

- Cleaning guidelines
 1. Specify bleach-cleanable fabrics whenever possible, even if staff does not clean furniture with bleach, because patrons may bring and use bleach wipes. Light colored fabrics should not be used.
 2. Specify a moisture-barrier backing for woven fabrics whenever possible.
- Non-woven fabrics (e.g., silicone, polyurethane, vinyl) are recommended for surfaces that patrons will sit on or touch frequently. Woven fabrics may be incorporated in less touched areas, such as on chair backs, or as accents.
- Durability
 1. Fabrics that meet a minimum of 100,000 double rubs in the Wyzenbeek abrasion test are recommended.
 2. Non-woven fabrics should meet all current requirements for hydraulic testing according to ISO 1419 or ASTM D3690, to avoid delamination.

5. SHELVING

Heights

- Shelving heights should coordinate with accessible reach ranges and eye levels for the age group they serve.
- Shelving should not interfere with staff visibility and sightlines.
- Shelving height guidelines:
 1. Adult and YA Collections: 5 shelves, 66" high
 2. Juvenile Collections: 5 shelves, 54" high
 3. Early Literacy Collections: 3 shelves, 42" high

Manufacturers

- Library staff can recommend preferred and vetted vendors.

Fixed Wall Shelving

- Fixed wall shelving should not exceed 6 shelves high and should be anchored to the wall to meet seismic standards.
- The lowest shelf should not be used for books except in children's and teen areas. If it is necessary to place books on lower shelves in adult areas, use sloped base shelving that is higher off the floor and angled outward for easier access.



Mobile Shelving

- Limit the width of each mobile shelving unit to 2 ranges where possible, otherwise shelving may be too heavy for staff to move.
- Mobile shelving heights must not exceed 59 inches, per code requirements.
- Lower-shelf guidelines for mobile shelving are the same as for fixed shelving (see **Fixed Wall Shelving** in this section).
- **Finish guidelines.** For metal shelving, choose from manufacturers' standard colors (no custom colors).

Children's Shelving

- See 2. Public Spaces—Children's Spaces.

Magazine & Display

- Display shelving should be mobile and allow for books to face outward. Locate some display shelving near the library entrance.
- Magazines should be stored and displayed in clear acrylic boxes that sit on the shelves. Flip-up periodical storage should be avoided.



Examples of mobile display shelving.