Re-arranging the Furniture:
Options and Ideas for Library Space Usage

If your library is pressed for space, consider some of these solutions to tailor your space to your patrons' needs, and to make the most of the space you have.

CRYING ROOM

We've all seen this situation. A harried mother attempts to use the computers at the library while a young baby cries in a carrier next to her seat. She needs to pay the bills. She's logged into her bank account, but she doesn't want to leave the computer alone. And there's only 15 minutes left of her allotted computer time for the day.

In general, people recognize that the library is a communal space; some noise is to be expected when a large group of people find themselves assembled in the same room. But think about using rooms in a different way. For example, if you have an underused storage closet, perhaps it's possible to put a computer and a table in it for parents who need to use the computer but have a crying child who is disturbing the rest of the patrons. Decorating with children's books and toys can also help calm a restless toddler. This has been a common solution to crying children in churches – why not implement something similar in a library?

PRIVATE COMPUTER AREAS

There are times when patrons need to conduct private transactions on a computer. These include banking, filling out housing applications, applying for jobs, looking at medical data, or researching options in cases of domestic abuse. Think about having a few computers in carrels with privacy screens, placing the monitors out of the sight line of the room, or putting the computers at the ends of computer rows to avoid foot traffic. Consider collaborative computing areas where multiple people can use the same computer in order to, for example, work together on translating a job application form or email tutorial.

MULTI-PURPOSE ROOMS

Library boardrooms are often used for regular board meetings and, in some cases, for community group meetings. Consider seeking donations of tables with folding legs that can be easily arranged into different formats group work sponsored by governmental and community agencies. Focused job fairs, parenting classes, health care workshops, and more can serve those in need. Balance those needs with those of those community groups who can afford to pay for the room rental. Study rooms can be used not only for study groups, but also for use by local community organizations for a grant-writing project space, or for tutoring sessions offered by a local English as a Second Language (ESL) provider.

COMPUTER SIGN-UPS

Use a signup system that allows a patron to use a computer without letting anyone else know that they were in the library, much less which computer they used. Think of someone who is applying for unemployment and wants that whole process kept absolutely

private. Many vendors offer different options, but just keeping the paper signup sheet behind the desk will solve the problem.

HANDOUT RACKS

To ensure maximum exposure, handouts should be placed around the library, but especially near exits, since many people may not wish to carry extra material around with them until they are ready to leave. If certain materials are targeted toward a certain need, consider placing some of them in the stacks near reference materials relating to that topic as well as in obvious places, such as near the reference desk. Consider using not only traditional racks, but also whatever dispensers fit your space or your materials. Napkin dispensers might work for small-format brochures; explore national suppliers, such as Demco, as well as local suppliers, to get an idea of available off-the-rack shelving as well as customizable options.