Cambridge Public Library Strategic Framework

Mission

Welcoming all, inspiring minds, empowering community

Vision

A democratic Cambridge where everyone can learn, connect, and thrive

Values

- **Equity:** We advocate for free and equitable access for all. We acknowledge the inequities that have shaped our society, and we take intentional action to create more equitable outcomes.
- **Intellectual Freedom:** We advocate for the free and confidential exploration and expression of information and ideas. We embrace diversity of people, opinion, and thought.
- **Learning:** We champion books, reading, and the life of the mind. We affirm the power of literacy, inquiry, and discovery throughout one's lifespan.
- **Community:** Our libraries are about people. We adopt a human-centered approach to serving you. We support our staff, and we collaborate with others to achieve collective impact.
- **Public Service:** We strive to provide responsive and engaging service to all. We are responsible stewards of the public resources that have been entrusted to us. We seek sustainable practices that are environmentally sound, economically feasible, and socially equitable.

Strategic Priorities

Priority 1: Patron Experience

We deliver welcoming, inclusive, and engaging library services.

Objectives

- Welcome you to the Library with excellent customer service
- Provide a wide range of collections, services, and experiences to satisfy your needs and interests
- Protect your privacy and intellectual freedom
- Reduce barriers to access
- Offer flexible and inviting civic spaces
- Reflect the diversity of the community in our staff and services

Examples of Current and Future Work

- Knowledgeable and helpful staff to assist you
- Investment in our physical and digital collections

- Updates to the Library's Collection Development Policy
- Open hours that include evenings and weekends to accommodate your schedule
- Free access to public computers, Wi-Fi, printers, scanners, and takeout technology
- Library card design contest

Priority 2: Lifelong Learning

We foster the cultural and intellectual vitality of our community.

Objectives

- Champion literacy in all forms, from birth through adulthood
- Nurture the growth, learning, and school readiness of our youth
- Offer joyful and inspiring experiences around literature, arts, and sciences
- Preserve and make accessible our diverse historical and cultural heritage
- Support your lifelong pursuit of educational and recreational interests

Examples of Current and Future Work

- Partnerships with local schools and school libraries
- Author events, book clubs, story times, and sing-alongs
- Passes to visit local museums and cultural institutions
- 1:1 tech help and group technology classes to advance digital equity
- Programs and classes on information and media literacy
- Opportunities for STEAM learning, creativity, and collaboration in The Hive makerspace

Priority 3: Community Resilience

We cultivate community well-being and our shared democratic traditions in uncertain times.

Objectives

- Facilitate community dialogue and informed civic involvement
- Promote a sense of belonging through opportunities for community participation, engagement, and celebration
- Connect you with resources and services to meet your needs
- Equip you to navigate the modern digital world

Examples of Current and Future Work

- Programs that counter social isolation through a focus on human connection
- Resource navigation and referral assistance by the library social worker around behavioral health, substance misuse, and housing insecurity and homelessness
- Partnerships and collaboration with other public agencies and community-based organizations
- Public education and community dialogue on artificial intelligence
- Participation in City efforts to adopt sustainable practices and prepare for extreme weather

Priority 4: Organizational Excellence

We strive for continuous improvement of our operations and infrastructure. We invest in our team so we can best serve you.

Objectives

- Develop our staff through ongoing training and learning
- Practice group norms that support a culture of equity and inclusion
- Maintain library buildings and technology to meet current and future needs
- Increase awareness and use of the Library through storytelling and advocacy
- Use data and assessment to inform our decision making and improve services
- Maximize the impact of our funding
- Explore new and innovative approaches to our work

Examples of Current and Future Work

- Customer service, de-escalation, and digital literacy training for library staff
- More opportunities for you to provide feedback on library services
- Ongoing maintenance, such as HVAC upgrades and furniture replacement
- Accessibility and technology improvements at library locations
- Partnership with the Cambridge Public Library Foundation and the Friends of the Cambridge Public Library on advocacy and fundraising
- Active engagement and leadership in local, regional, national, and international library associations

Community Insights

Several key themes emerged through the strategic planning process.

- **Community satisfaction with library services.** 91% of respondents in the 2025 City Resident Survey rate library services as either "good" or "excellent." 96% of respondents to the Library's community survey indicated they were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with Cambridge Public Library services, with 78% selecting "very satisfied." Community members praised the Library's welcoming atmosphere, breadth of resources, and the customer service provided by attentive, knowledgeable staff.
- **Sustained community engagement with the Library.** 74% of respondents in the 2025 City Resident Survey had visited a Cambridge Public Library location in the last year. In the Library's community survey, 84% of respondents indicated they had used library services at least monthly over the past year. 13% of respondents indicated that they use library services daily, and another 49% indicated that they use library services weekly.
- **Library buildings are well-used and need continued investment.** Our libraries welcome a million visits each year. Seating, study room, and meeting room availability can be limited during peak hours. Some program spaces, like the Main Library Lecture Hall, need technological upgrades to meet today's needs.
- **The Library is a community connector and a space for community bridging.** Our libraries are inclusive places where community members gather, deepen connections with each

other, and engage in dialogue. However, sometimes there are some tensions between people looking for different versions of an ideal library experience. The Library can continue to be a place for community collaboration and for healthy conversations on challenging topics.

- **Social isolation and mental health challenges.** We are experiencing an epidemic of loneliness and the lasting impacts of the pandemic. Many community members are continuing to struggle with mental health and substance use disorders. Some of our youth are also struggling. Library staff welcome everyone and can connect people with vital resources and services to support their well-being.
- **A rapidly changing information landscape.** The rise of generative artificial intelligence (AI) and AI chatbots has exacerbated the existing digital divide across skills, devices, and connectivity. It is more challenging than ever to find reliable information that you can trust. Consolidation in media, book publishing, and digital platforms and tools challenge people's privacy, choice, and access.
- **Economic and political turbulence.** The high cost of living, general economic uncertainty, constrained municipal budgets, and federal actions impact the entire community, but they have a disproportionate impact on our most vulnerable community members. This includes but is not limited to immigrants, the unhoused community, and the LGBTQIA+ community.

Methodology

The Library conducted a one-year process of research, information gathering, and strategic plan development, which included the following:

- Staff survey and staff input sessions
- Community survey with 2,147 responses
- Community chats at Library locations with 334 participants
- Outreach at community events and sites
- Planning session with the Cambridge Public Library Board of Trustees, Cambridge Public Library Foundation, and Friends of the Cambridge Public Library
- Landscape scan of issues impacting the community
- Leadership session to vision and discuss findings
- Multiple strategic planning committee work sessions
- Evaluation of the existing mission, vision, and values statements

About the Cambridge Public Library

Since 1889, the Cambridge Public Library has been a vital civic hub, social impact innovator, and community haven. Through the Main Library and six neighborhood branches—Boudreau, Central Square, Collins, O'Connell, O'Neill, and Valente—the Library operates as a unified system to offer free library services and programs to 122,000+ residents in diverse neighborhoods across the City's six-and-half square miles. Each year, we welcome a million visitors, circulate 2 million items, and host more than 4,500 free community programs. The system is funded primarily through property taxes as a department of the City of Cambridge and receives additional support from the Cambridge Public Library Foundation and Friends of the Cambridge Public Library.

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- **Cambridge Public Library Foundation**
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