

Cambridge Public Library Strategic Framework Accomplishments, 2019-2025

Introduction

Over the past six years, staff, board members, volunteers and community partners of the Cambridge Public Library (CPL) have aligned our work with our [strategic framework](#) and advanced our mission of welcoming all, inspiring minds, and empowering community. Through our efforts, we arched toward a vision of Cambridge where everyone has equitable opportunities to learn, where people live their best lives, and democracy thrives. Our service to the Cambridge community has reflected and promoted our values: access, community, diversity, intellectual freedom, learning, people, social justice, and sustainability.

Together, we have accomplished a lot!

Summary

We launched more than 40 small to large-scale projects under the themes Welcome & Inclusion, Arts & Ideas, Learning & Literacy, and Community & Democracy. We extended our branch hours by 54+ hours per week in the evenings and weekends increasing access for students and workers, and our library system now offers 354+ hours of service per week across seven locations. We went fine free to eliminate barriers to borrowing library materials. We made major inroads in technology offerings to patrons including access to circulating Chromebooks, hotspots, and other devices, as well as opportunities to learn how to use technology. Working with Innovators for Purpose (iFp), our STEAM Academy program offers Cambridge middle and high school students opportunities to learn design thinking and explore careers in STEAM. We opened our net-zero Valente Branch and upgraded the Lewis Room and furnishings at the Central Square Branch. Our rich portfolio of programs with authors, scholars, artists, instructors, community leaders, and library staff connect community to literature, ideas and each other. Today our programs are much more reflective of the exciting diversity of the Cambridge community than ever before.

Highlighted Metrics

From FY19 to FY25, the Library's circulation has grown by 42%; patron visits by 4%; programs by 39%; program attendance by 27%; outreach activities by 34%; outreach participation by 28% and total open hours by 21%.

Impact

Our work under our strategic framework has enabled us to deepen and expand our reach, especially for underserved community members. Every project has dozens, hundreds, or thousands of impacts, improving and enriching the lives of Cambridge residents and library patrons. Here are a few examples.

In a one-on-one Tech Help session, we supported a first-generation college student gain access to a free refurbished laptop, hotspot, and LinkedIn Learning access, enabling him to sustainably complete his coursework while pursuing his dream of launching a Tech Empowerment & Social Justice small business to uplift his community. This community-driven collaboration bridged the digital divide, providing technology access and skills that support for self-empowerment, economic mobility, entrepreneurship, and digital inclusion.

Since 2021, close to 31,000 patrons have built STEAM skills in one or more areas at the Library, including over 150 teens and young adults each year who utilize The Hive and Learning Lab spaces as part of internship, design coursework, and career development programs such as Innovators for Purpose (iFP) each year. All eight teens who graduated from high school while enrolled in STEAM Academy in the 2024-2025 academic year started at two-or four-year colleges this fall. Seven of them are pursuing STEAM courses of study including design, engineering, and computer science, while the eighth plans to pursue a political science degree to create lasting change around the education and workforce inequities she witnessed firsthand. One alum reflected, “iFp gave me the tools to think critically, advocate with purpose, and approach complex issues through an interdisciplinary lens.” Another noted, “At the start of the program, I never expected to gain so much. I developed both technical and non-technical skills that will be invaluable in the future. It was a truly rewarding journey.”

In 2020, with guidance from Hoverlay and iFP instructors, students created, “This Should Not Be,” an augmented reality campaign addressing systemic racism. Created in the wake of George Floyd’s tragic death, the project was featured on the Library’s lawn for 18 months. CPL commissioned and hosted this installation, which drew thousands of visitors and sparked essential conversations about systemic racism and inequality. This public/private project was groundbreaking because it marked the first time Hoverlay and a public library hosted a digital overlay developed by teens, empowering young voices to address critical social issues. Following

Our Creative Aging Programming provided opportunities for older adults to stay engaged and build community as they age. One patron expressed gratitude for our Drawn from Nature art class. She said that the class was a valued experience, and “*most important was the two hours of creativity and community.*”

CPL's staff delivered outstanding service to our patrons, connecting them with critical resources and ensuring they are represented in our collections. One patron wrote *"Librarians truly are angels in disguise. When I couldn't sign into my library account, a staff member patiently worked with me on the phone. We couldn't solve the problem, so she suggested I bring my computer in. The lovely lady at the tech desk not only solved the problem but gave me some basic instructions about how to navigate my new laptop."*

Branch Hours Expansion

One of the top community requests has been to expand branch hours so that children can go to their neighborhood library after school and workers can access their branch library in the evenings and weekends. Prior to the branch expansion, only two libraries were open on Saturdays; now four libraries have Saturday hours. Before the branch hours expansion, three branch libraries were open four days per week; now they are regularly scheduled at least five days a week. In recognition of requests for contiguous Sunday hours, Summer Sundays began four years ago. Sunday hours are additionally important for providing community members an enriching cool place to be. A Valente Sunday patron wrote, *"You should continue the program. It has been a huge relief during the summer's heatwaves."* (Welcome & Inclusion)

All Gender Restroom Installation

With the completion of three public all gender restrooms at new Valente Branch in 2019, the Main Library was the only branch without a dedicated all gender restroom. Two all-gender restrooms were available to the public, but only during specific hours—the bathroom on the second floor Administrative offices and on Level 1 downstairs in the Hive makerspace. However, with capital funding, the Library was able to study, design, and construct an all-gender restroom that could be open all the hours that the Main Library is open. This was completed in 2025, and the project was featured in the Massachusetts Library System's Library Guide and video on [Ensuring Accessibility and Inclusion for All](#). Now all libraries throughout the Cambridge Public Library system have all-gender restrooms available to the public during all the hours our libraries are open. (Welcome & Inclusion)

Fine Free

After a yearlong pilot, the Library went fine free in 2021 and no longer charge fines for late returns or renewals of library materials. The goal was to ensure that everyone in the community has equitable access to library books and materials. The Library also cleared past overdue fines and bills for lost or damaged Cambridge-owned children's and young adult materials to welcome back patrons with a fresh start. Going fine free has eliminated a barrier to borrowing and library use for community members. (Welcome & Inclusion)

STEAM at the Library

Planning for STEAM at the Library began in 2018 in partnership with the City's STEAM Initiative in the Department of Human Service Programs (DHSP) and the Cambridge Public School District (CPSD). The STEAM Initiative ensures that through equitable access to high quality STEAM programming and resources, all Cambridge residents, regardless of social and economic barriers, are STEAM literate and possess the skills necessary to be successful, engaged, and responsible community members in a rapidly changing world. The intention behind STEAM at the Library is that all seven libraries become experiential learning labs for cultivating STEAM Habits of Mind. Between July 1, 2019 and June 30, 2025 CPL hosted 3,317 STEAM programs reaching 40,246 participants. Importantly, the number of STEAM programs has steadily increased. (Learning & Literacy)

The Hive Makerspace

The public-facing hub for Cambridge STEAM Initiative and a primary space for STEAM learning is The Hive makerspace at the Main Library. This creative space was constructed in 2019/2020 and opened in 2021 after the pandemic. It features state-of-the-art digital and traditional maker equipment, podcast and audio recording studios, and an extended reality space, with expert staff to help guide patrons in their learning. Since opening, over 5,600 patrons have trained in The Hive. On average, each month 40 classes are offered to familiarize the public with tools and processes ranging from sewing, 3D modeling and printing, and video production; an additional 120 hours is scheduled as Open Shop time for patrons to utilize the skills they have acquired to work on personal projects in a supportive environment. Staff work in partnership with many school groups and nonprofits, especially ones aimed at helping young people to acquire STEAM skills. (Learning & Literacy)

STEAM Academy

In partnership with Innovators for Purpose and other community groups, we welcome middle school and high school students along with recent high school graduates to engage in immersive STEAM courses and internships. Nurturing the untapped potential of youth from underrecognized groups empowers them with the skillsets to enter into the innovation economy that characterizes Cambridge and prepares them for a workforce which urgently needs their voices and perspectives. These courses of 15-25 students each center design-thinking, problem-solving and community impact while providing the young people with windows, mirrors, and doors into STEM fields. Participants actively collaborate with the community to create solutions and designs utilizing technologies such as augmented reality, artificial intelligence, coding, and multimedia production. This collaboration paired with intentional opportunities for public engagement, enhances students' leadership and community-building skills while fostering the confidence necessary to navigate the challenges of an increasingly complex world.

- iFp Labs – Middle schoolers (grades 7–8) spark curiosity through hands-on projects in robotics, AI, and design—building confidence and creativity from the start.
- iFp Studios – The flagship paid internship program for high school students, where students tackle real-world challenges year-round and grow as problem-solvers and leaders.
- iFp Next – Supporting STEAM Academy alumni through college and career with mentoring, internships, skill-building, and industry connections in Kendall Square and beyond.
- The work of STEAM Academy is amplified through student-led projects such as large-scale public installations, social justice campaigns, podcasts and student-led summit events to address pressing issues including education inequity and the challenges and opportunities of AI technology.

Since its inception, STEAM Academy has had close to 400 youth enrollments, with many students continuing across multiple months and years, thus deepening their learning. Students are going on to pursue higher education and careers in STEM and the creative industries. (Learning & Literacy)

STEAM Kits

Since 2019 we have made STEAM kits available to borrowers to encourage and support STEAM learning and habits of mind at home. Themed kits include: Family Logic Backpack, construction and building kits, Gear-Bots, Optical Illusions Backpack, K’NEX kits, Stargazing Backpack, and more. Many of these resources would be cost-prohibitive for patrons to purchase and several are custom-built. Today we offer 322 STEAM kits across our seven libraries! (Learning & Literacy)

Digital Equity

Through our Digital Equity Partnership of City, School, community-based and affordable housing providers, we aim to provide all community members with tools, learning opportunities, and tailored support not only to meet their most basic needs, but also to enable them to succeed in a connected world, fostering a community where digital equity is attainable for all.

Digital Equity means a Cambridge where everyone has equitable *digital* opportunities, which in turn lead to jobs, social services and assistance, access to health information, and online safety practices. Technology inequities persist in our community, including for community members without permanent housing, immigrants and those with low technical literacy. Our objective is to prioritize individualized programs and services so that community members have the information technology skills and support they require for full participation in 21st-century life. The Library, DHSP and partners seek to continue to improve access to technology and skills-building and career pathways for our community members, especially those who are most vulnerable. Strong digital literacy skills are crucial for overcoming the barriers many individuals and families face.

Digital Equity is core to the Library's mission. Our existing efforts to address the digital divide in Cambridge include: a Takeout Technology program across all library branches; multiple online learning databases and tools available to the public; renovated and accessible public computer workstations and a Learning Lab at the Main Library; and knowledgeable staff. Staff includes the Digital Equity Manager who came from Tech Goes Home and is bilingual in Spanish and English and a digital equity specialist who has a tech learning background and speaks multiple languages including Kinyarwanda and English. In total, the Library offers 354 hours of service per week across their seven locations including after-school, evenings; and weekends; circulates educational technologies across all branches, and it has a state-of-the-art makerspace at the Main Library (see above).

Since 2023 through July 2025, the Library has offered 143 Basic Tech Classes and 636 Tech Help sessions for 1,775 patrons and under Cambridge's Digital Navigator Program in partnership with CCTV, Just-A-Start, and others. From July 2024 to July 2025, CPL distributed 117 devices and assisted over 500 patrons with tech help, tech access, and referrals. (Learning & Literacy)

Takeout Technology

In 2020, we began circulating laptops and hotspots. Today we circulate Chromebooks, hotspots, Chromebooks with built-in hotspots, portable DVD players, and device chargers at all our libraries, as well as a GoPro at the Main Library. Since its inception, CPL's Takeout Technology program has grown to include over 700 items circulated more than 22,000 times. An additional 300+ technology items for in-library use have circulated more than 27,000 times. In 2025, CPL began offering 537 Take Home Chromebooks and hotspots. 100% of Take Home Hotspots, Chromebooks, and Chromebooks with built in wifi circulate within one year of deployment. (Learning & Literacy)

Valente Branch Opening

The new Valente Branch opened on November 4, 2019, as part of the King Open and Cambridge Street Upper Schools and Community Complex. The Valente Branch is the most public and front-facing element of the community complex and serves as the anchor for both the building and the neighborhood. The Valente Branch, King Open, Cambridge Street Upper Schools and Community Complex are net-zero buildings. Valente is the largest building in Massachusetts to achieve Net Zero Emissions and earn a LEED v4 Platinum certification.

The Valente Branch was designed with flexibility in mind. Shelving and desks are on casters and there is a barn door to a community room so activity can spill out into the library space. The proximity of schools and library create strong connections including for preschool visits and an after school safe space for kids to study. In the years since it opened, the Valente Branch has grown in popularity. In the past few years, it has welcomed more than 130,000 visitors and circulated more than 100,000 items annually. In addition, recent years, the Valente Branch has served as a safe space for the influx of immigrants and refugees housed by the City in a nearby

municipal building that was doubling as an emergency shelter. Working with the city, Valente staff arranged for library cards so shelter residents could take full advantage of the library including access to computers and the internet as well as books, games, and programs. The branch also served as a place to meet with care providers. A young man who was living in the emergency shelter became a regular at the weekly English as a Second Language classes at the Valente branch and now visits regularly with his younger siblings, who are enrolled at the school next door.

The Valente Branch spills out on to the civic plaza and welcomes the city in including with a beloved reading garden that serves as a venue for outdoor programs. Awards include:

- 2021 AIA/ALA Building Award
- 2021 AIA New England Design Merit Award
- 2022 7th [IFLA Green Library Award](#) short list for “Best Green Library”
- 2022 COTE® Top Ten Award
- 2022 Boston Society of Architect's (BSA) [Harleston Parker Medal People's Choice Award](#)
- 2023 Urban Libraries Council Top Innovator in Health and Wellness

(Welcome & Inclusion)

Social Work Services

The CPL's first licensed social worker, the first social worker hired to work for a library system in Massachusetts, began working out of the Central Square Branch in March 2021. Our social work team has now evolved to include social work interns at various times. The team provides direct supports to patrons across the library system and referrals to social service providers in the area. In addition, the team trains and consults with staff on topics such as de-escalating challenging situations, co-regulation, and trauma informed approaches to serving the public. Our Social Worker is meeting regularly with 41 different patrons by appointment and has conducted over 35 street outreach sessions with community partners.

A recent success story involves our work with a hearing and vision-impaired patron who was referred by library staff to help with his transition into an assisted living facility. What began as a half-hour session to assist with making a phone call to book a mover quickly became several weeks of preparing the patron for a major life transition including learning how to balance the physical, emotional and spiritual components of well-being. The patron has successfully moved into his new residence and, through this process, discovered how to trust his innate resources and resilience. (Community & Democracy)

Central Square Branch Improvements

Improvement of the Central Square Branch was one of the top requests that emerged through the strategic planning process. With \$570,130 in capital funding, we mounted new exterior Library signs, replaced furniture and created lounge zones and desktop work zones on the first

floor. We improved the children’s room layout with new shelving, soft furniture replenishment, and a new rug. The Lewis Room’s kitchen area was updated, the carpet and lighting replaced, and windows repaired. The renovated Lewis Room opened last September, and we’ve hosted 360 library programs and bookings since then. (Welcome & Inclusion)

Art Installations

The Library has made great progress advancing the strategic priority of Arts and Ideas. This priority celebrates the cultural and intellectual vitality of the city; champions books, reading, and a life of the mind; and offers joyful and inspiring experiences around literature, arts, while preserving and making accessible diverse historical and cultural heritage. Since the strategic plan in 2019, several significant art works have been on semi-permanent display at the Main Library and Branch locations including:

Ed Emberley Main Library Children’s Room Mural

The celebrated children’s book creator Ed Emberley, who grew up in Cambridge, has written and illustrated more than 100 books, including his popular drawing books. He received the Caldecott Medal, the highest honor for a children’s book illustrator in the United States, for *Drummer Hoff*, a 1968 collaboration with his wife, Barbara. In 2019 the Cambridge Public Library Foundation, with support from the Margret and H. A. Rey Curious George Fund, commissioned a mural for the space inspired by his work. The mural, painted by local artist Caleb Neelon, has four panels that whimsically present scenes from both fantasy and reality, with process-oriented borders illustrating how basic shapes and lines can form colorful, detailed scenes. Families engage with it daily, and the Library is thrilled to celebrate the art and legacy of Ed Emberley in this way.

David Fichter Mural on Display at Valente

The Valente Branch Library is home to a mural entitled *A Tavola Non Si Invecchia*, an Italian saying meaning “at the table one does not grow old.” Commissioned in 2019 for the former Salt & Olive Market in Harvard Square, the mural was created by David Fichter, assisted by Liane Noddin, and was donated to the Valente Branch through the Friends of the Cambridge Public Library by the founders of Salt & Olive when the restaurant closed. It celebrates Cambridge’s history and diversity by depicting city luminaries and leaders past and present gathering for a festive meal. Represented figures include Marilyn and Sheila Brass (The Brass Sisters), Joyce Chen, Julia Child, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Harriet Jacobs, Denise Jillson, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, E. Denise Simmons, and Josefina Yanguas.

Diane Asséo Griliches photographs at the Main Library, Collins and O’Neill branches

Diane Asséo Griliches’ photographs capture libraries big and small, showcasing the grandiosity of the old and the utilitarian of the new. Griliches’ black and white photographs capture the

wonder, joy, appreciation, and immersion of the individual in the library, while transforming libraries into shrines of community and learning. Griliches' photographs in partnership with the Library of Congress's Center of the Book, in *Library: The Drama Within*, are displayed at the Main Library, Collins and O'Neill branches.

The Outdoor Mural at the Central Square Library Celebrates Knowledge and Learning

Since 2019, the Central Square Branch has displayed a mural created by the Dominican American muralist Silvia López Chavez that celebrates the many ways libraries serve communities. The mural is part of the [Central MURALS](#) program, a partnership of the Central Square Business Association, the Central Square BID, the Central Square Cultural District, and Cambridge Arts to create new murals in prominent locations along the Massachusetts Avenue corridor to showcase the history and culture of Central Square. The 240-foot-long and 20-foot-tall mural spans the length of Pearl Street, between Green and Franklin Streets, and turns onto part of Franklin Street. Set against the backdrop of dynamic colors and graphic elements such as flying birds, paper planes, and open books, it evokes the vibrancy of Central Square and the Branch Library. The Pearl Street façade incorporates words and patterns that assist with wayfinding. Chavez is a graduate of the Massachusetts College of Art & Design and the Altos de Chavón School of Art & Design in the Dominican Republic.

Kehinde Wiley "Young Girl Veiled" at the Main Library

Kehinde Wiley, a Los Angeles native and visual artist based in New York, is known for reimagining the Western portrait tradition with Black protagonists and for his 2018 official presidential portrait of Barack Obama. The Library displays two Wiley prints, on loan from an anonymous donor and facilitated through the Cambridge Public Library Foundation. *Young Girl Veiled* is hung in the Main Library by the glass corridor that leads to the historic building. Wiley said this piece "speaks to the layered complexities of sight and knowledge, provoking inquiry by sitting at the intersection between the masculine and feminine, the historic and the present." *Sharrod Holsten Study III* is hung in the Central Square Branch children's area. The classic pose in this portrait, held by a young Black man, subverts traditional renderings of race and gender. The subject is adorned with pink carnations and ladybugs, offering a very delicate portrait.

Kadir Nelson "After the Storm" at the Valente Branch

Kadir Nelson is a painter whose work has graced the cover of *The New Yorker* and the pages of award-winning children's books, hung in galleries and museums, been enjoyed in miniature (on commemorative U.S. postage stamps honoring American legends!), and sought after by private collectors. His primarily figurative paintings and sculptures focus on historic narratives and heroic subjects in American culture. A large-scale reproduction of Nelson's piece, "After the Storm," has been on display at the Valente Branch Community Room since 2020. Started and

completed during the pandemic in 2020, “After the Storm” is a testament to the human spirit, resilience, faith, and determination during a dark time. With this piece, Nelson calls upon humankind to stand together and mobilize to create a path forward as we emerge beyond our current challenges, imagining what life looks like after the clouds part and the storm clears. The Valente Branch is a natural home for this beautiful print, which is on loan from an anonymous donor through the CPL Foundation.

The Hive Mural

A creative mural was created by local artist Daniela Gamba. Painted on canvas, the mural depicts a female patron speaking into a microphone and wearing a headset, as though leading a podcast, broadcasting the news, or recording a song. The mural also shows hands at a sewing machine, working with conductive fabric, and hands soldering a circuit board. There are also hexagonal shapes reminiscent of a honeycomb and several images suggesting creative design and the neurons fueling creativity. A graduate of the Massachusetts College of Art and Design, Gamba is a Boston-based illustrator, digital artist, and the lead illustrator for the citizen-science online game Eyewire This mural was funded by the City of Cambridge and the CPL Foundation. (Arts & Ideas)

Presenting a Diverse Range of Authors and Speakers

Library program planners have presented an increasingly diverse range of authors and speakers under this framework, and these programs not only better reflect the diverse and intersecting communities served by the Library, but also expose patrons to new ideas and experiences. The following is an abbreviated list of some of the authors and speakers we have presented recently.

- Ruha Benjamin (*Race After Technology*)
- Nuruddin Farah (*Terrorist*)
- Author Robin DiAngelo (*White Fragility*)
- Emily Bernard (*Black is the Body*)
- Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka in conversation with Professor Henry Louis Gates Jr.
- Heike Schotten (*Queer Terror: Life, Death, and Desire in the Settler Colony*)
- Suraj Yengde (*Caste Matters*) in conversation with Dr. Cornel West
- Danez Smith (*Homie*)
- José Olivarez (*Citizen Illegal*)
- Paul Ortiz (*An African American and Latinx History of the United States*)
- Saeed Jones (*How We Fight for Our Lives*) in conversation with E. Patrick Johnson
- Kiese Laymon (*Heavy*) in conversation with Jesse McCarthy
- Nate Marshall (*FINNA*)
- Ruby Hamad (*White Tears/Brown Scars: How White Feminism Betrays Women of Color*)

- Dina Gilio-Whitaker (*As Long as Grass Grows*) in conversation with Daniel Faber
- Hoa Nguyen (*A Thousand Times You Lose Your Treasure*)
- Cathy Park Hong (*Minor Feelings*) in conversation with Courtney Sato
- Michelle Zauner (*Crying at H Mart*) in conversation with Eric Kim
- Ashley C. Ford (*Somebody's Daughter: A Memoir*) in conversation with Shira Erlichman
- Eric Nguyen (*Things We Lost to the Water*)
- Nathan Harris (*The Sweetness of Water*)
- Kaitlyn Greenidge (*Libertie*)
- Barbara F. Walter (*How Civil Wars Start and How to Stop Them*)
- Louise Erdrich (*The Sentence*) in conversation with Joan Naviyuk Kane
- Katie Kitamura (*Intimacies*) in Conversation with Meghan O'Rourke
- Malinda Lo (*Inside the Telegraph Club*)
- Annette Gordon-Reed (*On Juneteenth*)
- Peter Goodman (Davos Man) in conversation with Kate Tuttle
- Ilyon Woo (*Master, Slave, Husband, Wife*)
- Omer Aziz (*Brown Boy: A Memoir*)
- Isabella Hammad (*Enter Ghost*) in conversation with Namwali Serpell
- Xochitl Gonzalez (*Olga Dies Dreaming*) in conversation with Jess Rizkallah
- Amanda Peters (*The Berry Pickers*) in conversation with Grace Talusan
- Diannely Antigua (*Good Monster*)
- Celeste Ng (*Our Missing Hearts*) in conversation with Nina MacLaughlin
- Tracy K. Smith (*To Free the Captives*)
- Carmen Maria Machado (*Her Body and Other Parties*) in conversation with Claire Luchette
- Reginald Dwayne Betts (Founder and CEO of Freedom Reads)
- Valeria Luiselli (*Tell Me How It Ends*)
- Kristen Arnett (*Mostly Dead Things*) in conversation with Jill McDonough
- Stephanie Foo (*What My Bones Know*)
- Cristanne Miller (*The Letters of Emily Dickinson*)

These authors and speakers represent a wide array of backgrounds, interests, perspectives, and identities. Included here are authors who visited the Library from abroad as well as long-time residents of Cambridge, authors who speak English as a second or third language, bestselling fiction writers, memoirists, essayists, translators, poets, academics, formerly incarcerated authors, authors with disabilities, queer authors and indigenous authors.

Several of these authors and speakers appeared in support of heritage month programming, including Carmen Maria Machado (Latinx Heritage Month), Diannely Antigua (Caribbean American Heritage Month), Kristen Arnett (Pride Month) and Stephanie Foo (Disability Pride Month). Others spoke as part of a pre-existing Library lecture series. Valeria Luiselli, for

example, appeared in February 2025 as part of the “Our Path Forward” Lecture Series, a series of talks devoted to issues related to the health of our democracy. Luiselli, an award-winning author in multiple genres, and an immigrant herself, discussed issues surrounding immigration as well as her experiences volunteering as a Writing Instructor in a youth immigrant detention facility.

Several of these events drew more than 100 patrons, and in three cases, attendance exceeded 200 patrons. These numbers attest to the Library’s ability to connect patrons with prominent and bestselling authors, and also reflect the Library’s commitment to increasing access for all patrons. To build on this commitment, program planners began to offer the option to attend many of the Library’s premier author talks virtually via livestream. (Arts & Ideas)

Senior Programming

The Library’s programming for seniors continues to expand with nature walks, meditation and wellness classes, art classes, writing workshops and more. Offerings include Beading Workshops, Meditation, Cooking, Improv, Zumba Gold, Botanical Drawing, Nature Walks, and Tai Chi.

These offerings promote critical elements in supporting older adults as they age—physical activity, artistic expression, emotional wellness, and opportunities to engage in community and develop social ties with others. The response has been overwhelmingly positive, and we are proud to be meeting the growing demand for enriching, community-based programming. Over the past five years, we have hosted 2,726 events for 9,482 older adult participants.

Our Older Adult Service Librarian works in tandem with organizations such as the Cambridge Insight Meditation Center, the Cambridge Council on Aging, The Living Well Network, and Cambridge Neighbors to help realize programming that aligns with the needs of this population. For example, in conjunction with the Cambridge Council on Aging and the Living Well Network, the Library hosted a community screening and discussion of the documentary *The Age of Love*, which highlights the need for connection regardless of age.

Our Older Adult Service Librarian has also strengthened connections throughout the city through delivery services. Each month, librarians curate and facilities team members deliver library materials, ensuring continued access to information, entertainment, and connection for those unable to visit in person. In FY25, approximately 540 deliveries were made to 59 individuals, who received nearly 8,000 items through our home delivery service. (Community & democracy). The program has measurable impacts. For example, a patron shared that after receiving reference resources related to health they were able to prepare for an upcoming doctor’s appointment. Access to relevant information was critical in helping them navigate the appointment and know what questions were important to raise with their provider.

Summer Reading is for Everyone

Our Summer reading program has evolved from being just for kids, to a program for kids and a program for adults, to one program *for everyone* – BINGO! - with age-appropriate bingo cards for early childhood, school-age youth, teens, and adults. Patrons filled out bingo boards with fun reading prompts and collected prizes as they read. A total of 4,339 patrons participated in summer reading this year!

We heard from an adult patron who submitted their bingo board via email at the end of summer: *“I also wanted to let you know that thanks to your bingo board it actually had me reading again in a substantial way for the first time in many, many years.”*

Plain Language and Language Justice work

The Library has worked to advance Language Justice through multiple avenues. We have partnered with the City Language Justice Division to offer and promote Plain Language training to staff across the organization in order to ensure that our written communications and promotions are accessible to the community. This collaboration has deepened with Library staff participation in training on the Multilingual Helpline and promotion of that service to patrons seeking access to Library resources.

The Library is currently implementing a new provision of the CPLSA Union Contract that allows for stipends to staff who speak a language other than English. We now circulate Massachusetts RMV Driver’s Manuals in 13 languages other than English, supplementing our existing collection of materials in seven languages other than English. In addition, important written materials explaining core Library services and how to access them have been professionally translated into languages commonly spoken in Cambridge. (Community & Democracy)

Supporting Sustainability

CPL continues to support sustainability efforts. In addition to opening the net-zero Valente Branch Library, as part of Participatory Budgeting in 2018 we partnered with the Department of Public Works and sustainability partners to install solar panels on the roof of the Main Library. We encourage sustainable commuting practices and host City partners who hold biking workshops and fix-it clinics. We’ve also installed water bubblers in all our libraries. Expanded branch library hours and Summer Sundays also provide an air-conditioned and warm learning and civic space for community members throughout the year. (Community & Democracy)

Friends and Foundation Two-Lane Approach

Over the past year, representatives of the Friends, Foundation, and Trustees met to explore how the Friends and Foundation could optimize their work to best support the Library. An agreement was reached for a two-lane approach: the Foundation will do the primary fundraising on behalf of the Library and the Friends will provide additional support for specific services including

purchasing museum passes for the public and professional development funds. We thank both supporting organizations for working together to provide optimal support for the Library to serve the people of Cambridge. (Community & Democracy)

Additional Projects

In addition to the projects described above, dozens of other projects took place by staff, often collaborating with community partners during this period. These include:

- Patron Privacy Improvements
- Collection Development Policy Update
- Supporting Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Staff Trainings and Service Planning
- Ways of Being Group Norms Creation
- Walking Tours
- Book Groups Outside Library Walls
- Instrument Petting Zoo
- Music Series Launch
- 5th Anniversary of Sidewalk Poetry Commemoration
- Expanded International Briefing
- Nerd Nite Conversation Series
- Borrower Services Brochure Redesign
- Job Hunting and Resume Writing Help Expansion
- Museum Passes at Branches
- Online Readers Advisory
- World Language Collections Expansion
- Cooking Program Series
- Heritage Month Programming
- Expanded Our Path Forward
- Door Counters
- Community Learning Garden
- Family Night
- Safety Maps and Emergency Protocols
- Senior Programming—previously described
- Expanded Self-Checkout Option to all Branches

Conclusion & Acknowledgements

The Cambridge Public Library is a community gathering place of learning, connection and empowerment. Over the past six years, we have deepened our commitment to making our libraries more welcoming, accessible and reflective of the rich diversity of Cambridge. There are many people to acknowledge and thank.

The staff of the Cambridge Public Library are the front lines of exceptional library service and are recognized for their dedication to public service. With 359 open hours per week, staff members work many different schedules including evenings and weekends. During the Covid pandemic, the CPL team found creative ways to get library materials into the hands of community members including teaming up with food, health, and shelter services and to provide “curbside” service. Trustees advised on our strategic work and provided leadership support, and our Friends and Foundation offered important philanthropic support, as well as community ambassadorship. Additionally, our community, City partners, and City leadership provided collaborative endeavor, wisdom, care, and service.

Thank you to the Library Strategic Planning Steering Committee for their work: Reinhard Engels, Diana Fendler, Muna Kangsen, Joy Kim, Kathy Penny, Julie Roach, Becky Rowlands, and Jason Yee, as well as to consultant Maureen Sullivan.

Looking Ahead

During the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the Cambridge Public Library is entering a new strategic planning process coordinated by a new steering committee. We will review data and seek input from staff, stakeholders, and the public. We are excited to continue to support our beloved Cambridge community through the provision of excellent and inclusive library services.