



Strategic Plan FY2022 – FY2026

DRAFT

INTRODUCTION & CONTEXT

Pollard Memorial Library is the public library for the city of Lowell, Massachusetts. The Library operates a main branch downtown, a small branch with limited services within the Senior Center, and a virtual branch known as Library 24/7. Lowell is home to a diverse population of approximately 115,000 residents, more than 25% of whom were born outside of the U.S. (2020 Census population estimates).

The Library seeks to represent and serve all members of the community in a welcoming and inclusive environment while maintaining strong community partnerships and providing access to a wide variety of physical and digital materials. The most recent circulation statistics unaffected by the COVID-19 pandemic are from FY2019 when the Library boasted an overall circulation of materials of just about 155,000. Circulation of physical holdings was negatively impacted by the pandemic, as were in-house visits and program statistics. Digital materials saw an increase in circulation during this time, however, and we hope to build on that success.

In March 2021, we formed a Planning Team to guide the strategic planning process with the purpose of establishing forward-thinking goals for the Library. Amanda E. Standerfer, a consultant from [Fast Forward Libraries](#), facilitated our planning process. Planning Team members included:

- Bridget Cooley, Community Planning Librarian
- Douglas Cooper, Library Assistant
- Belinda Juran, Chair, Pollard Memorial Library Foundation
- Felicia Lerow, Library Assistant
- Elizabeth Manning, Head of Circulation
- Donna Richards, Chair, Pollard Memorial Library Trustees
- Victoria Woodley, Library Director
- Sean Thibodeau, Coordinator of Community Planning
- Alison Zaya, Adult Reference Librarian

We spent a great deal of time during this process gathering community feedback to ground our future plans in community needs and desires. During the initial phase of our planning process we:

- Met with the Board and staff members to conduct an environmental scan and SOAR analysis (strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results);
- Collected feedback from the Board and staff members via a survey;
- Conducted a community survey;
- Held focus groups;
- Interviewed community stakeholders;
- Reviewed library and community demographic data; and
- Browsed strategic plans from other community organizations.

We recognized the importance of obtaining input from as wide a variety of constituents as possible, so we reached out in various ways (emails, paper surveys, electronic and paper newsletters, personal invitations) to a variety of organizations representing Lowell residents of diverse ethnicity, age and socioeconomic resources. We collected all this data into a Learning Report, which appears as the appendix to this plan document.

Considering the insights gathered from the community as set forth in the Learning Report, the second phase of our planning process consisted of a series of retreat sessions with Board and staff members. It was during these sessions that the elements of this plan began to emerge. We spent time brainstorming and discussing how to align current library services and activities with the aspirations we hope to achieve, including the goals of a more welcoming library, expanded outreach services, a culture of teamwork, increased engagement and advocacy, and overall growth of library resources.

Finally, the Planning Team brought together plan elements into this document for the Board to review, refine, and approve. Next, staff will work at the department-level on activity plans, which will be brought together to coordinate library-wide activities to manage the implementation of the plan. Additional implementation details can be found in the Next Steps section at the end of this document.

OUR STRATEGIC PLAN

VISION

Options to consider:

1. Enriching lives and connecting the community through opportunities to explore, learn, and grow.
2. Connecting the community to lifelong learning and growth.
3. Enriching lives through education and literacy for every citizen.

Info here re. vision statement...

Note: During the process, we noted the tagline “Making Connections” as a possible communication tool, which can be used in many ways – “Making Connections to Learning” “Making Connections to Resources” etc.

MISSION

Options to consider (in the order of interest from the Planning Team):

1. We are a vital community resource/hub dedicated to helping people and building community connections through equitable access to resources, technology, information, and learning opportunities.
2. We are a community hub that provides access to information, lifelong learning, and diverse resources, and connects people to one another and learning opportunities.
3. (new suggestion) We are a vital hub of learning and connection within the City of Lowell, dedicated to linking our diverse residents with one another and with the [information, technology, learning opportunities and other] resources they need to continuously grow throughout their lifetimes.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

This plan is divided into five goals with corresponding objectives. The five goals are:

Welcome -- Outreach -- Advocacy -- Culture -- Engage

During the Board and staff retreats, the discussion focused on the key ways the Library should move forward to expand community partnerships, increase diversity of Library resources, and create a staff culture that values teamwork and communication. We also want to engage with the community through increased opportunities outside of our walls. We look to reassess our physical spaces to provide a more welcoming atmosphere and find new ways to communicate the Library's value to stakeholders. Finally, we aim to engage community members by connecting them to resources and each other through technology, programs, and collections.

GOAL 1: *WELCOME*

Create accessible and inclusive spaces that are comfortable, flexible, and easy to use.

The Library exists to serve the community, and providing welcoming facilities is a critical part of our success. Patron comfort and overall satisfaction starts with inclusive and welcoming staff. Valuing the overall user experience, we will update the building layout and navigation, provide more accessible parking, increase diversity in language collections, and improve technology and digital resource offerings.

OBJECTIVES:

- 1.1 Review and update wayfinding signage language and symbols to make building navigation easier.
- 1.2 Create a building plan that offers alternative layout options (including furniture placement).
- 1.3 Increase world language collections.
- 1.4 Develop a technology plan to guide upgrade and replacement of equipment, software, and online tools (including the website).
- 1.5 Create a library accessibility plan to facilitate better physical and technological access to library resources for all residents, including those of different physical and language abilities.
- 1.6 Conduct a parking study that results in a recommendation for increasing parking access.

Possible measures of success:

- Overall usage increases
- Program attendance increases
- Circulation increases
- Patrons are able to find their way around the building
- Patrons report feeling welcome and overall patron satisfaction increases
- Website usage increases
- Digital resource use increases
- Usage by patrons who are differently abled increases

GOAL 2: *OUTREACH*

Celebrate community diversity by strategically connecting people where they are with library services through partnerships and in neighborhoods.

Outreach to our community beyond the Library doors is an increasingly important part of serving our patrons. Taking our programs and services “on the road” through pop-up libraries, delivery services, and expanded partnerships with community organizations will help us better serve a variety of populations in our community.

OBJECTIVES:

- 2.1** Develop a plan for outreach services that includes short-term options (like pop-up library services and setting up a table at community events) and studies long-term options (like hybrid (in-person and virtual) programming, and a mobile library or branch system).
- 2.2** Create a partner plan by assessing current partnerships and discussing opportunities for deepening joint work and expansion to new partners.
- 2.3** Consider ways to reach more patrons through home delivery services.

Possible measures of success:

- Community connections and partnerships increase
- Outreach efforts enable more people to access library services in multiple formats
- Delivery service is started and delivery numbers steadily increase
- City residents express increased awareness of and increased satisfaction with library services

GOAL 3: *ADVOCACY*

Demonstrate the value of a well-funded, sustainable, community-focused library.

Improving the community's understanding of the Library's many services is key to carrying out our mission. We aim to increase awareness of the Library's overall value by introducing new marketing techniques as part of an overall community engagement plan. Engaging more intentionally with community stakeholders will allow staff and trustees to better tell the Library's story and garner support for the increased budget needed to fulfill our vision for the Library in the community.

OBJECTIVES:

- 3.1** Equip Trustees and other advocates to communicate with stakeholders about resources needed to effectively operate the library.
- 3.2** Offer annual tours for city officials and other stakeholders and develop brief monthly communications to keep communication channels open.
- 3.3** Work with the city for an increased budget using 5-year budget projections.
- 3.4** Develop a community engagement plan that communicates the value of the Library for the entire community while continuously gathering input from residents on how the Library can best serve their needs.
- 3.5** Establish a facility maintenance plan to prioritize resolving current building issues and details ongoing upgrades and replacement of the library structures and systems.

Possible measures of success:

- City funding for the Library increases each year
- Trustees report confidence advocating for the Library
- Stakeholders understand the value provided by the Library
- City budget funds the Library at least at the MAR each year
- Community awareness of library services increases
- More residents advocate for the Library with City leaders

GOAL 4: *CULTURE*

Cultivate a strong, supportive organizational culture dedicated to continuous improvement to increase job satisfaction and excellent patron experience.

The Library staff is the heart of the organization. We seek to support a culture of inclusivity and transparency that positively impacts our daily interactions with patrons and community partners. We will cultivate staff feedback and design new team processes with the objectives of improving communication and diversity efforts, implementing training and onboarding, and developing professional growth plans for staff.

OBJECTIVES:

- 4.1** Create a staff committee to develop a culture statement that includes assessing staff job satisfaction, ideas for improving team dynamics
- 4.2** Design and implement standardized customer service standards that includes training current staff, how to on-board new staff, and ways to measure success.
- 4.3** Consider ways to expand diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts by creating a staff committee to guide activities
- 4.4** Create professional development plans for each staff member.

Possible measures of success:

- Staff feels more confident
- Staff reports higher job satisfaction
- Patrons report increased satisfaction with customer service
- Staff reports better communication

GOAL 5: *ENGAGE*

Expand community reach and impact by connecting people to information literacy, resources, and programs for exploration, learning, and growth.

The Library is a community hub with a wealth of resources and cultural opportunities. We will reassess and prioritize the selection, expansion, and promotion of our collections. We will also further the integration of programming and materials with an eye to digital and diverse collections and programs.

OBJECTIVES:

5.1 Develop a collection development plan and update the selection policy (including gift acceptance policy). Form a committee to meet quarterly to review the collection development plan and plan for collection interfiling.

5.2 Coordinate program planning related to monthly themes to allow for cross-promotion with collections and online resources.

5.3 Expand digital offerings.

5.4 Promote world language collections that reflect the needs of Lowell's population.

5.5 Develop a technology plan that considers community access needs and includes a replacement schedule.

Possible measures of success:

- Patrons report satisfaction with the world languages collection
- Increased usage of world languages collection
- Overall circulation increases
- Program attendance increases
- Digital circulation increases

NEXT STEPS

After this plan is adopted by the Board in October 2021, staff will complete the activity plan to guide implementation. Implementation is a continual process, as the timing of certain activities will be determined by priority and influenced by the timing of a new building project. Review and adjustment of the activity plan will happen on a regular basis.

Evaluation of the plan will be ongoing once the plan implementation is underway. The Planning Team will meet a final time to review and discuss an evaluation framework that will inform what success looks like as the Library implements this plan. Measurements for each goal will vary, and some activities will be best evaluated by collecting data through patron and community surveys. Other activities will be evaluated based on information collected in-house such as circulation and usage statistics, program participation, and staff feedback. Some goals will be met by creating deliverables, like plans for outreach and engagement. Continued reporting of successes and challenges will ensure that the Library is transparent about progress and open to input.

The Library commits to a comprehensive review and update of this plan at its completion. This plan will move Pollard Memorial Library significantly forward in guiding our strategies for a stronger Library and welcoming presence in the community, both within and outside of our building. This plan is an investment in the future of the Library as a critical asset of the overall community.