



Kansas City Public Library

Strategic Plan 2026



Kansas City
Public Library

Table of Contents



01 Introduction

Letter From the Board President	6
Letter From the Director and Executive Chief	7
Our Legacy of Community Service	8
Our Reach & Strategic Future	10
A Community & Staff-Driven Process	12

02 Foundational Components

Strategic Plan at a Glance	17
Vision, Mission, Values	18
Strategic Priorities	20

03 Activating the Plan

Organizational Aspirations	30
Implementation Roadmap	32

04 Acknowledgments	34
---------------------------	-----------



Introduction

Letter From the Board President

Letter From the Director and Chief Executive

Our Legacy of Community Service

Our Reach & Strategic Future

A Community & Staff-Driven Process

Letter from Pete Browne

President, Board of Trustees



On behalf of the Board of Trustees, I extend a heartfelt thanks to everyone who contributed their ideas and insights over the past several months. We are proud to have co-created this plan. Through months of collaboration with Library staff, community partners, donors, and thousands of patrons, we gathered invaluable input that helped shape the next steps of the Kansas City Public Library's future. Your voices and ideas were essential in building a shared vision that truly reflects our community.

In the following pages, you will find a strategic plan that is the result of this robust engagement and community spirit I mentioned above. It reflects the values of our community and outlines an ambitious vision for strengthening the Library's role as a trusted resource. I am incredibly proud of this plan, as it represents something far greater than a guiding framework on paper. It reflects a shared commitment to ensuring livability, vitality, and opportunity for all in our community.

That shared commitment matters.

Our Library has always been a place for books, learning, and connection. This plan honors those traditions while charting a course of how we serve Kansas City in a changing world. It calls for renewed efforts to bridge the digital divide, deepen partnerships with local organizations, and expand opportunities for literacy and lifelong learning for all ages. Most importantly, it centers inclusion and belonging by creating spaces where everyone feels welcome to engage and thrive.

This is not just an aspiration. It is an action plan that will continue to require community support to put it into motion.

The Board of Trustees remains committed to supporting Library leadership and staff as they work to bring this vision to life, and we will champion this organization as critical infrastructure for an informed and engaged Kansas City. We know that strong libraries bring communities together for powerful stories, thoughtful conversations, and a deeper understanding of the world and each other. Libraries – interwoven into the fabric of communities – truly matter.

With pride, optimism, and purpose, I invite you to join us on this journey. Visit your Library, or better yet, make a new connection by visiting a branch outside of your neighborhood. Share your ideas and aspirations. Partner with us and advocate for the Library when opportunities arise.

Together, we can ensure our Kansas City Public Library remains a vibrant, vital beacon of our city for generations to come.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Pete Browne', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Pete Browne
President, Kansas City Public Library
Board of Trustees

Letter from Abby Yellman

Library Director



I am delighted to share our newly completed Strategic Plan with you. This plan reflects a collective vision for the Kansas City Public Library and reaffirms our responsibility to grow and evolve alongside the vibrant, diverse communities we serve. It represents our aspirations for the future and our commitment to stewarding a pillar of public life with care, transparency, and purpose.

Words do not adequately express our gratitude for the many community members, partners, board members, and staff who contributed their time, insight, and lived experience throughout this process. The result is a thoughtfully crafted roadmap shaped by collaboration across neighborhoods, generations, and perspectives. It reflects the hopes of our community, the dedication of our staff, and the foundational role our Library plays in Kansas City. This plan is a strategy grounded in professional expertise and the voices of those who rely on, invest in, and believe in their Library.

More than a document, this is a living framework that will guide our decisions, priorities, and resources in the years ahead. Anchored in our refreshed vision, mission, and values, it offers a shared language, providing clarity and direction while remaining flexible enough to respond to a changing city. As Kansas City and its surrounds grow and transform, so too must its library by embracing innovation, honoring local identity, and meeting emerging needs with intention and equity.

Our future efforts will center on three strategic focus areas:

- **Supporting All Learners:** We remain committed to lifelong learning for all by cultivating joy, advancing literacy, fostering personal growth, and creating opportunities for intergenerational connection and empowerment.
- **Fostering Community Pride:** We will strengthen our role as a trusted civic convener, celebrate and preserve local history, and nurture a shared sense of ownership and pride in Kansas City's past, present, and future.
- **Facilitating Inclusive Experiences:** We will strengthen what it means to be welcoming by creating spaces, collections, and services shaped by community voices while ensuring every person feels a sense of belonging and connection.

This is a pivotal and exciting moment for our Library. I invite you to join us in bringing our shared vision to life through your advocacy, partnership, and investment which are essential to ensuring the Library continues to inspire, connect, and uplift everyone in our community.

With gratitude and commitment,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Abby Yellman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

Abby Yellman
Library Director and Chief Executive

Our Legacy of Community Service

For more than 150 years, the Kansas City Public Library has been a cornerstone of service and community connection, growing alongside the city and adapting through periods of expansion, change, and transformation.

From pioneering one of the nation's first children's rooms and free lending programs to launching the city's first bookmobile, a 24/7 Digital Branch, and eliminating late fees, the Library has consistently modeled barrier-free, responsive public service.

A Trusted Civic Anchor

Across generations, the Library has addressed critical community needs by supporting cultural life, bridging technology and service gaps, and providing safe, inclusive spaces where people can access information, learn, and connect freely. This enduring presence has established the Library as a trusted civic anchor, strengthening Kansas City's social, educational, and cultural fabric and inspiring long-term public investment.

Over time, the Library has evolved beyond its traditional role as a lending institution to become the heartbeat of a thriving community.

The Library supports learning across the human lifespan, fosters cultural expression, expands access to technology, and provides pathways to essential community services. By connecting people with information, resources, and one another, the Library expands opportunities for residents and fosters stronger community connections.

150+
years
of impact
and service

10 sites

IN ADDITION TO:

Bookmobile
Digital branch

143,359
active
cardholders

62,822
Youth
Program
participants

4,185,295
online visits
to Digital Branch & KCLibrary.org

2,539,639
total circulation

890,956 books borrowed | 1,648,683 eBooks,
audiobooks, music videos, and podcasts borrowed

Our Reach & Strategic Future

Our urban public library district serves more than 250,000 residents directly through nine neighborhood branches, a Central Library, a Digital Branch, and extensive outreach efforts, while also supporting 2.2 million people across the greater metropolitan area.

As Kansas City faces ongoing digital divides, literacy gaps, demographic shifts, and increased demand for safe community spaces, the Library continues to build upon its legacy of transformative service that strengthens and unites the community.

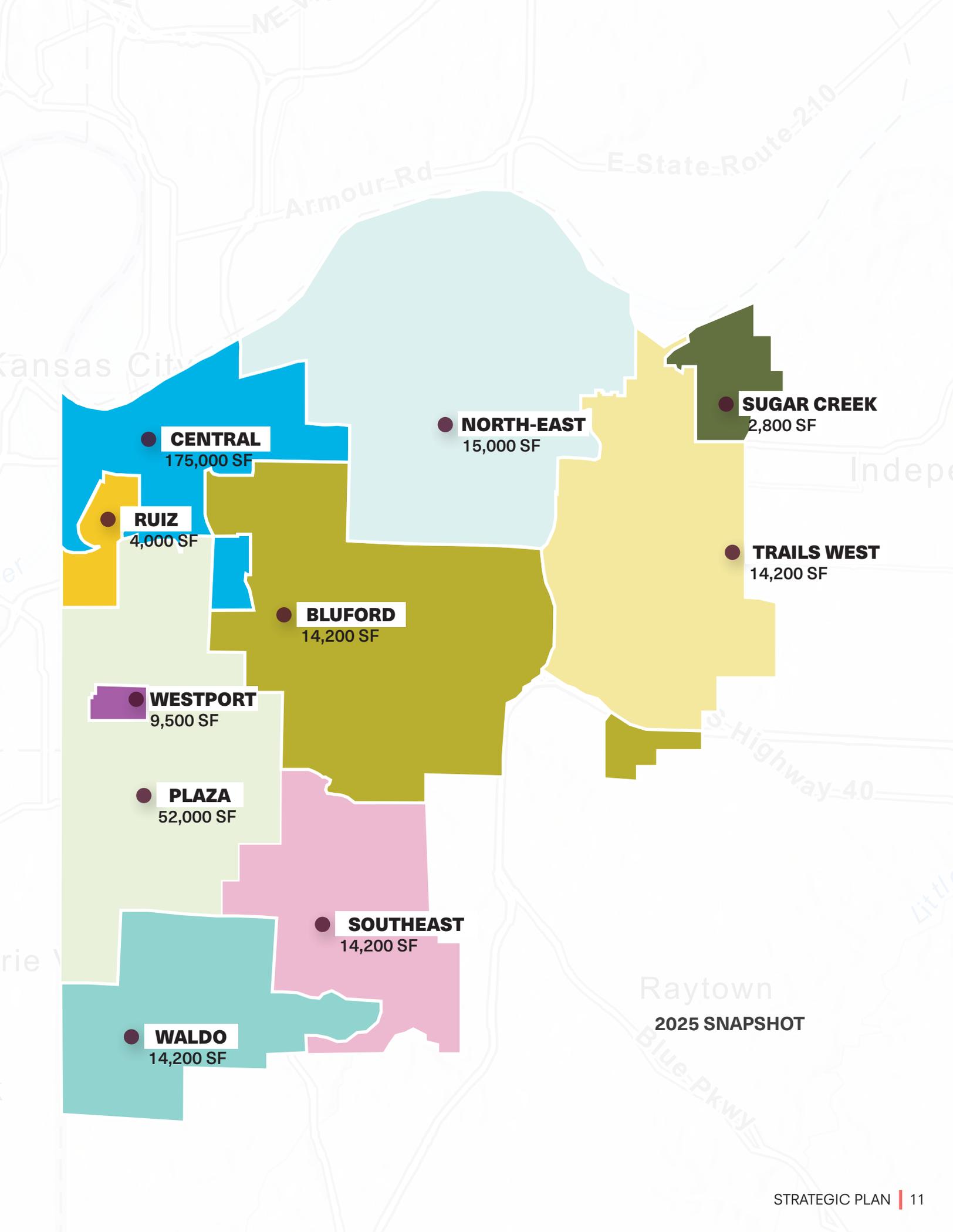
By meeting people where they are and responding with care, flexibility, and intention, the Library strengthens shared belonging and remains an essential civic resource that adapts alongside the communities it serves. By modernizing branches, addressing historic service gaps, and expanding support for multilingual, refugee, and immigrant residents, the Library is shaping a more equitable, accessible, and connected Kansas City. Continued community investment will ensure this work thrives.

A Roadmap for Tomorrow

As the city evolves to meet new opportunities and challenges, the Library is uniquely positioned to respond to opportunity gaps, safety concerns, and broader social and economic pressures with care, creativity, and purpose. Meeting this moment requires a shared vision, aligned action, and strong partnerships that extend the Library's reach and deepen its impact.

This strategic plan charts a course for our Library to thrive as a cornerstone of community life, now and for generations to come.

It sets a clear direction for investment and action, guiding decisions, focusing resources, and shaping services that help build a more connected, informed, and thriving Kansas City for generations to come.



Raytown
2025 SNAPSHOT

A Community & Staff-Driven Process

To shape the future of the Library, the strategic planning process included many ways to gather input from staff, community partners, and residents across Kansas City. Staff at all levels, the Library Board of Trustees, and the public shared feedback through surveys, focus groups, and collaborative workshops.



Leadership

9 Board of Trustees Conversations

14 Working Group Meetings

2 Board Presentations



Community

9 Community Focus Groups

Targeted Groups

Youth & Family |
Bookmobile | RISE |
Signature Event

Open-Session Groups

Arts & Culture | Civic
Partners | Social
Services | Education |
Health & Wellness

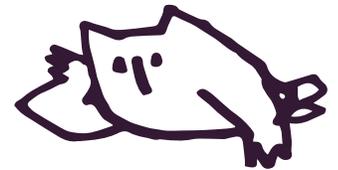
4,788 Completed Community Surveys

in English and Spanish

8 Site Visits

*Central Library
Plaza Branch
Lucile H. Bluford Branch
Trails West Branch
North-East Branch
Irene H. Ruiz Branch
Southeast Branch
Bookmobile*

43 Partner Organizations Consulted



Staff

193 Completed Staff Surveys

6 Strategic Planning Workshops

2 Early Adopter Workshops
2 Executive Team Workshops
2 Combined Workshops*

Sessions included staff from across all parts of the organization and these meetings fostered co-creation of core elements of the plan.

*Early adopters are Library staff from across the organization with varied roles and tenure. They contributed their perspectives to the strategic plan through collaborative workshops.





Foundational Components

Strategic Plan at a Glance

Vision, Mission, Values

Strategic Priorities



Our Strategic Plan
guides our work
and shapes our
impact.



Strategic Plan at a Glance

This at a glance summary outlines the key elements of the Strategic Plan and how they come together to support the Library's work and community impact.

Vision

A Kansas City inspired by possibility, where everyone belongs.

Mission

The Kansas City Public Library cultivates connection through experiences that educate, empower, and celebrate our stories.

Values

Neighborly | Joyful
Curious | Trusted
Inclusive

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1

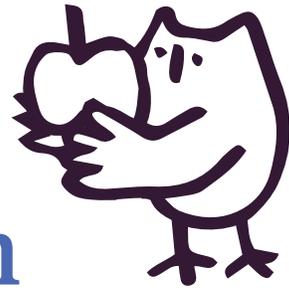
**Supporting
All Learners**

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2

**Fostering
Community
Pride**

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3

**Facilitating
Inclusive
Experiences**



Vision

The future we aspire to create.

A Kansas City inspired by possibility,
where everyone belongs.

Mission

Our purpose and what we do.

The Kansas City Public Library
cultivates connection through
experiences that educate, empower,
and celebrate our stories.

Values

The actions and behaviors that guide how we work, interact, and make decisions.

Neighborly

We are kind and reach out, build meaningful connections, and work together to strengthen our community. We listen, collaborate, and empower everyone to feel welcome and supported.

Joyful

We approach our work with purpose and joy, navigating conversations and decisions with intention. We celebrate successes, learn from missteps, and create experiences that engage, uplift, and inspire.

Curious

We lead with curiosity and courage. We convene communities and bring people together around new ideas. We experiment, take action, and solve problems creatively to move our work and community forward.

Trusted

We are a trusted source of information and a reliable presence in an evolving world. We anchor our communities with care, consistency, and integrity, today and for generations to come.

Inclusive

We remove barriers and create access so all voices can be heard, every story can be shared, and everyone can fully participate in and be empowered by our Library's resources.

Strategic Priorities

Guided by community feedback, our Strategic Priorities show where we are focusing our work. They help us turn our mission and vision into real action and serve as a foundation we can build on.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1

Supporting All Learners

Nurture a love of learning and build foundational skills that empower individuals at every stage of life.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2

Fostering Community Pride

Bring people together to celebrate local culture, share community stories, collaborate, and strengthen civic connection.

Strategic Goals

- 01 Support Individual Growth, Resilience, and Empowerment
- 02 Cultivate a Culture of Coordinated, Joyful Learning
- 03 Prioritize Foundational Skills and Networks for Learners

Strategic Goals

- 01 Serve as a Trusted Civic Convener
- 02 Celebrate and Preserve Local History and Culture
- 03 Deepen Neighborhood Partnerships and Community Involvement

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3

Facilitating Inclusive Experiences

Create community belonging through consistent services, programs, and collections that reflect community needs, interests, and aspirations.

Strategic Goals

01 Deliver Consistent, Community-Driven Services

02 Create Experiences that are Safe, Welcoming, and Friendly



STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1

Supporting *All Learners*

Nurture a love of learning and build foundational skills that empower individuals at every stage of life.



Community Needs

- Access to learning opportunities for all ages, including experiences that are engaging, fun, and accessible
- Support for building foundational literacy, core skills, and digital skills
- Opportunities that connect generations through shared learning
- Access to college, career, and workforce preparation, including job skills training
- Access to diverse books, materials, and technology that support learning

Related Offerings

Collections & Learning Materials | Early Literacy | Youth & Family Learning | Adult Lifelong Learning | Skill Development & Enrichment | Literacy & Reading Engagement | Digital Learning, Access & Technology Skills | Services for Educators



Goal 1

Support Individual Growth, Resilience, and Empowerment

1. Provide classes, resources, and collections that support personal learning goals, education, and careers.
 2. Offer skill-share programs and hands-on learning to build practical, transferable skills.
 3. Support young adults and new professionals with mentoring and preparation to enter college and the workforce.
-

Goal 2

Cultivate a Culture of Coordinated, Joyful Learning

4. Create opportunities where people of different ages learn from and support each other.
 5. Use play, creativity, and interactive approaches to make learning fun for all ages.
 6. Coordinate learning efforts across branches and community partners to share resources, avoid duplication, and increase impact.
-

Goal 3

Prioritize Foundational Skills and Networks for Learners

7. Strengthen programs that build foundational reading, math, technology, and social-emotional skills.
8. Work with parents, caregivers, schools, and community partners to provide wrap-around support for learners.

Fostering Community *Pride*

Bring people together to celebrate local culture, share community stories, collaborate, and strengthen civic connection.



Community Needs

- Access to opportunities for civic participation, community dialogue, and social connection
- Spaces that support respectful, inclusive dialogue
- Access to local history and cultural knowledge that reflects the community
- Access to arts and cultural programs that amplify local voices
- Strong, trusted partnerships to address shared challenges

Related Offerings

Community Events | Exhibitions & Gatherings |
Arts, Culture, & Civic Programs | Local History &
Heritage | Cultural Collections | Film & Media |
Street Sheets



Goal 1
Serve as a Trusted Civic Convener

1. Host forums, events, and programs that encourage open, respectful conversations on local issues.
2. Share clear, nonpartisan information to help people participate in civic life.
3. Work with trusted partners to connect people with reliable resources and support for critical needs.

Goal 2
Celebrate and Preserve Local History and Culture

4. Explore creative opportunities for people to engage and create shared meaning with the Library's local history archives, and cultural collections.
5. Gather and share community stories that reflect lived experiences and neighborhood identity.
6. Highlight local culture through programs, exhibitions, and events that can be shaped by each community.

Goal 3
Deepen Neighborhood Partnerships and Community Involvement

7. Collaborate with community members and local organizations to shape programs and services.
8. Increase language access and culturally relevant content through partnerships and bilingual support.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3

Facilitating *Inclusive Experiences*

Create community belonging through consistent services, programs, and collections that reflect community needs, interests, and aspirations.



Community Needs

- Access to safe, welcoming spaces where everyone feels they belong
- Access to consistent, equitable services across all locations
- Programs, events, and spaces that reflect community interests and experiences
- Personalized support and guidance that meets people where they are
- Language access and support for multilingual individuals and families
- Flexible, accessible spaces that support a wide range of programs and materials

Related Offerings

Outreach & Community Access | Refugee & Immigrant Services Empowerment (RISE) | Tap-In Center | Language Support | Health and Wellness Support | Multilingual & Diverse Collections | Library Spaces | Technology Services



Goal 1
**Deliver Consistent,
Community-Driven
Services**

1. Set clear service standards so people receive equitable and dependable service at every branch.
2. Empower branches to adjust programs and collections to reflect community interests, while following shared guidelines.
3. Establish regular methods to collect community feedback and use it to improve services and address gaps.
4. Use clear, multilingual communication and inclusive design so services are easy to understand and use.

Goal 2
**Create Experiences
that are Safe,
Welcoming, and
Friendly**

5. Design Library spaces that are flexible and welcoming for all ages, backgrounds, and abilities.
6. Use trauma-informed practices and relationship-building approaches that increase trust and reduce stress during Library interactions.
7. Support and train staff to facilitate friendly, respectful, and inclusive service.



Activating The Plan

Organizational Aspirations

Implementation Roadmap

Organizational Aspirations

These Organizational Aspirations describe how we must grow and improve as an organization to deliver on our Strategic Priorities. They connect our strategies to how the work actually gets done, guiding the internal changes, investments, and ways of working needed to bring our plan to life.

Embed Vision, Mission, and Values in Everyday Work

Use our shared language of vision, mission, and values to guide every interaction and decision, ensuring our daily work reflects our common purpose.

Strengthen Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing

Break down silos by sharing resources and ideas across all branches, so we can scale our best programs for the whole community.

Create a Unified Framework to Grow Our Services

Build a shared system for testing and launching services that balances high-quality standards with the unique needs of local neighborhoods.

Cultivate Leadership and Staff Growth

Invest in every staff member through mentorship and clear career paths, empowering everyone to lead from where they are.

Support Internal Success through Partnerships

Create a clear internal framework for working with community partners that supports staff, clarifies roles and expectations, and enables consistent, effective collaboration to build community pride.

Align Organizational Structure to Support Future Goals

Design our teams and workflows to ensure our structure provides the capacity needed to reach our short and long-term goals.



By investing in our people and improving how we work, we're building a **stronger Library** that better serves everyone.

Implementation Roadmap

This plan is a living document that will change as our communities evolve. The roadmap outlines the steps we'll take over the next few years as we learn, adapt, and grow.

PHASE 1

PHASE 2

Preparing & Setting the Stage

Lay a strong foundation by preparing internally and aligning around a shared understanding of the path ahead.

Activities

Convene Library staff to establish internal teams and advisory groups.

Assess current work against strategic focus areas. Stop work that doesn't align with strategic plan; continue/reimagine work that aligns; make backlog of work that needs to be started.

Begin identifying opportunities for collaboration or resource sharing across the system.

Establish KPIs; how we will measure progress against Strategic Plan goals.

Building Momentum & Advocacy

Generate energy and buy-in through early successes and expanded communication.

Activities

Identify and implement highest priorities that align with current capacity, community needs, and priorities.

Broaden communication efforts, ensuring we are celebrating successes across the system and with the public. Activate staff and public-facing dashboards.

Identify strategic partnerships and cross-Library collaboration that will support long-term implementation efforts.

Create a clear process for gathering community input and data to guide our next steps and focus our efforts where they are needed most.

← Communicate regularly with Library staff and

PHASE 3

Evolving & Scaling Projects

Activate the plan through evolving programs and initiatives, building capacity, and testing what works.

Activities

Where gaps exist from initial assessment, launch and scale pilot programs, services, and community-facing initiatives aligned with the plan's strategic goals and priorities.

Track our work in real-time and learn from our hands-on experience, so we can keep improving as we move forward.

Learn from our data and grow our most successful projects by giving staff the tools and systems they need to succeed.

Begin fostering and expanding partnerships with the community to support and strengthen projects.

PHASE 4

Evaluating & Refining the Plan

Evaluate outcomes, sustain what works, and revisit the plan to set the stage for the next cycle.

Activities

Evaluate pilot programs and initiatives to determine impact, effectiveness, and alignment with strategic goals and needs.

Decide which pilots to scale and what to redesign based on evaluation findings and feedback.

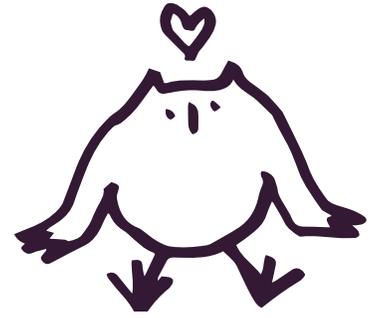
Adapt and refine strategies based on implementation learnings and emerging community needs to guide the next planning cycle.

Establish feedback loops that align progress reporting with the Annual Report to ensure transparency with key stakeholders.

board members to build shared understanding. —————>

Acknowledgments

The Kansas City Public Library would like to thank everyone who contributed to and supported the development of this plan.



This Strategic Plan is a product of the community it serves. We offer our sincere thanks to the **thousands of community members** who dedicated their time, shared their insights, and voiced their hopes for the future of the Library.

Additionally, we offer profound **thanks to the Kansas City Public Library Staff**, who participated in every phase of the planning process. Your commitment through participation in the Staff Survey, aiding in community outreach efforts, and demonstrating the unique needs of your branches and departments was **vital** to this plan's success.

Thank you.

The Library's Board of Trustees:

Claudia Oñate Greim
Elizabeth Warwick
India Williams
Jonathan Kemper
Laura Dominik
Pete Browne
Reid Day
Susan Kenney

The Library's Executive Team:

Abby Yellman
Pritha Hariharan
Carrie Coogan
Crystal Faris
Jami Hrenchir
Joel Jones
Margaret Perkins-McGuinness
Qun Fang

2026 Strategic Plan developed in coordination with:

Margaret Sullivan Studio

Margaret Sullivan
Jade Esplin
Grace Tilghman
Jenny Lau
Loren Landrum

Staff Early Adopters, for helping the Strategic Planning Team understand the Library's strengths and opportunities, co-creating specific plan elements and providing essential feedback and guidance:

Amanda Quance

Andrea Lafferty

Beccah Rendall

Coletta Hummel

Courtney Christensen

Cynthia Bruce

Dawn Mackey

Deborah Stoppello

Del Hamm

Deontay Harris

Eden Faulds

Elijah Winkler

Emily Schroeder

Haley Lips

James McGuire

Jeremy Drouin

Jimmy Thomas

Josette Schneider

Kim Angotti

Kim Gile

Lucy Donnelly

Marshall Cox

Mary Olive Joyce

MaShonda Harris

Michaela Johnson

Nick DeKrafft

Ruby Jones

Sunny Branick

Tshulthrim Zangmo

Wendy Pearson

The following organizations for their support and participation:

Arts & Culture

American Jazz Museum

Guadalupe Centers

Healthcare Institute for

Innovations in Quality

KC Ballet

KCUR

Kemper Museum of

Contemporary Art

Missouri Humanities

Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art

The Rabbit hOle KC

Civic Partners

Greater KC Chamber of Commerce

KCMO Parks + Recreation

Plaza District Council

Santa Fe Area Council

South Plaza Neighborhood Assoc.

Southtown Council

Urban League of Greater KC

Westside Neighborhood Assoc.

Wright Way Group

Education

Crossroads Charter Schools

Kansas City Public Schools

Kauffman Foundation

KC STEM Alliance

Latinx Education Collaborative

Operation Breakthrough

School Smart KC

Show Me KC Schools

Starting Early

Parent Leadership Training Institute

Turn the Page KC

Health & Wellness

BikeWalkKC

Care Beyond the Boulevard

Don't Look Back Outreach

Happy Bottoms

KCMO Health Department

Social Services

Della Lamb Community Services

DEPO-KC

Front Porch Alliance Kansas City

Great Jobs KC

Housing Authority of KCMO

Jewish Vocational Services

The Prospect KC



Kansas City Public Library
Moving forward, together

kclibrary.org
816.701.3400