# SEA GIRT LIBRARY

2022-2025

STRATEGIC PLAN

*The **heart** of Sea Girt, New Jersey*

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message from the board

The Sea Girt Library has been an important part of my life since I was a child. Every morning, my job was to deliver the New York Times to the library (then located in Borough Hall) after my father finished reading it. I lived with my parents for a few years as an adult and continued to deliver the paper every morning, although by then the library had moved to the train station. That experience taught me the value of our town library and the role it plays in our community, and I know many other families have had similar experiences throughout the years.

It has been my pleasure to serve on the Library Board of Trustees since its inception in January 2021 when our independent municipal library was formed. During these past two years, we have worked hard to provide the best services to meet the needs of our town. Not only are the newest fiction and nonfiction books available to adults and children, the library also offers electronic and streaming items on OverDrive (Libby), Kanopy, Hoopla and Flipster. The NJ State Library InterLibrary Loan system allows us to borrow items not in our collection from other libraries in New Jersey as well as from other states.

Programs and events continue to be a big part of the Library's mission, and our goal is to offer events for all ages, from children's Story Times and Munchkin Music to antique car shows, Cookbook Club and Book Club for grown-ups. As we emerge from the pandemic, attendance at these events is growing steadily and we welcome any ideas or suggestions of other options you'd like to see at the Library. Our mission is to serve you!

During the pandemic many members of our community contributed essays about their pandemic experiences which we collated and printed as a book titled Sea Girt Strong, our journey through the COVID-19 pandemic. The themes of caring for neighbors and kindness within our community area evident throughout.

Our statistics for 2021 show that Sea Girt Library is a vibrant place. We welcomed 6,121 visitors and circulated 9,343 physical items. Almost 2,000 items were streamed or downloaded, and 240 items were borrowed through InterLibrary Loan. 2022 is on track for even larger numbers.

The 2022 – 2025 Strategic Plan will provide a framework for the future, guiding us toward our mission of connecting and enriching the entire community. Thank you for being a part of this journey.

Sue Blasi, President
Sea Girt Library Board of Trustees

acknowledgements

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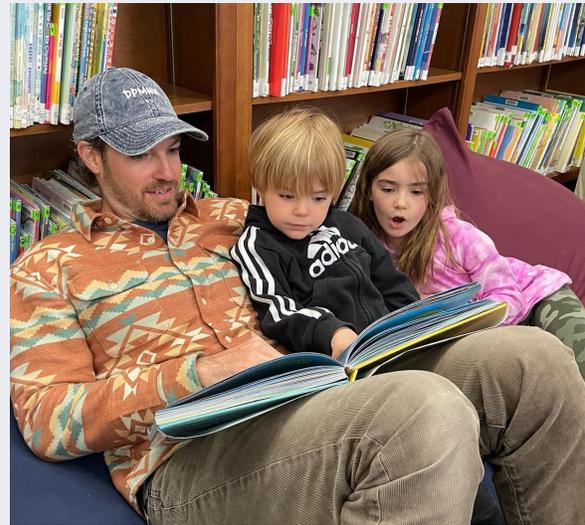
our process

The strategic planning process started with an in-depth analysis of the Sea Girt community. Consultants gathered data from quantitative sources, such as the U.S. Census and the NJ School Performance Report, to determine highlights, trends, and unique features.

In an effort to better understand the concerns, attitudes, opinions, challenges, experiences, and needs of the residents of Sea Girt, a community-wide survey was developed. The survey was distributed to residents and other stakeholders through the library's email newsletter and social media. It was also published in a print format and distributed throughout Sea Girt. More than 450 residents completed surveys to provide their input to the strategic planning process.

The information gathering phase also featured a staff and volunteer survey to solicit input from library workers to determine additional opportunities for strategic growth.

Consultants led a series of focus groups to explore themes identified in the surveys and obtain more detailed feedback from key stakeholders in Sea Girt. These focus groups included conversations with key demographics, including: senior citizens, community leaders, and working parents.

Following the conclusion of the information gathering phase, consultants met with the strategic planning committee to determine the overarching mission and vision for the strategic plan. Based on the information gathered from the community analysis, surveys, and focus groups, consultants conducted additional meetings to establish the goals and objectives of the strategic plan.

The final strategic plan is a result of a joint effort between the Sea Girt library community and consultants from Library Crossroads. The plan has been informed by input from the residents and various stakeholders of Sea Girt and analysis performed by consultants in collaboration with the library's strategic planning committee.

community analysis

Introduction

This analysis includes data from sources such as the U.S. Census Bureau and the NJ School Performance Report, as well as insight gained from surveys and focus groups. Measurable statistics provide us with an improved understanding of the Sea Girt community and help clarify emerging trends that were reflected in feedback from library staff and town residents.

At a Glance

Population and Demographics – Population statistics show little racial or ethnic diversity among the 1,866 year-round residents of Sea Girt. However, during the summer months the number of residents is much higher and possibly more diverse.

Computer and Internet Use – Sea Girt residents are highly connected to broadband internet and have their own computing devices. Not represented in the Census numbers is information literacy, a person's ability to fully and safely use the internet.

Education and Income – Sea Girt is a highly educated community, with about 75% of residents having at least a Bachelor's Degree. Sea Girt's median household income is $164,602, well exceeding the median income for New Jersey.

Location and Transportation - Sea Girt is a popular New Jersey shore destination in the middle of other shore towns along the Route 35 corridor. Sea Girt is easily accessible from the Garden State Parkway and Route 195.

Economy and Business – There are a number of small businesses located within the borough of Sea Girt, most are small and family owned. Sea Girt has a larger than average number of self-employed residents as well as a high number of retired individuals.

Population and Demographics

According to the 2020 Census, the population of Sea Girt is 1,866. However, as a shore town the population in the summer is considerably larger. Of the 1,866 residents, 95.4% identified as Caucasian in the most recent census. The second highest ethnicity is Hispanic or Latino at 3%.

The median age in Sea Girt is over 55, well exceeding the NJ average of 40. About 15% of the population is under the age of 18, which is below the state average of 22%. Almost 70% of households are married couple family households, with about 30% being either only male or female family households.

The largest ancestry groups in Sea Girt are Irish, German, and Italian, 53.8%, 24.6% and 19.8% respectively. Only 6.8% of residents speak a language other than English at home, and only 3.2% are foreign, compared to NJ averages of 31.6% and 22.7% respectively.

Almost all residents (96.4%) own their homes, which is more than the state average of 64%. There are only 1,305 housing units in Sea Girt. About 20% of those houses are valued between $500,000 and $999,999. About 74% of houses are valued at $1,000,000 or more. Most householders moved into Sea Girt in 2009 or earlier, and just about 14% are newer residents, having become householders after 2015.

Voices from the Community
The focus group and survey feedback described a town that values its close knit, small town community feel and its history. Some residents felt that the voices of the year round residents needed to be heard over those who visit Sea Girt or live there less often. Survey respondents felt the library served as an excellent place to bring the community together.

Computer and Internet Use

98.8% of Sea Girt households have broadband internet subscriptions. Almost all households have at least one type of computing device - about 92% have laptops or desktop computers, 88.9% have smartphones, and 76.7% have tablets. These numbers reflect a community connected to the internet at a much higher rate than the state averages.

Voices from the Community
While connectivity is high in Sea Girt, residents identified keeping up with technology, safeguarding against identity theft, and obtaining reliable health information as the most common challenges faced in the last few years.

Education and Income

Sea Girt is a highly educated community, with about 75% of residents obtaining a bachelor's degree, which is well above the state average of 40.7%. The Sea Girt school district serves 148 kids from Pre-K through 8th grade. After 8th grade students attend Manasquan High School as well as other public, county, and private high schools.

Proficiency results for the 2018-2019 Sea Girt School District in English Language Arts (89.9%) and Mathematics (83.8%) well exceed averages for the state by about 30-40 percent. Students in Manasquan High School are more diverse than those in Sea Girt, with 13.1% of the student population identifying as Hispanic, and 84.1% as White. Manasquan High School includes students from eight different communities and has a graduation rate higher than the state average.

The median household income for Sea Girt is $164,602, which is nearly double the NJ average of $85,402. The poverty rate is just 1.7% compared to a state average of 9.7%.

Voices from the Community
Sea Girt residents value lifelong learning opportunities beyond K-12 education. They would also like easy access to reading materials (print and digital) to further their education, mental wellness, and enjoyment.

Location and Transportation

Sea Girt is 1.6 square miles in size and is bordered on the east by the Atlantic Ocean. Sea Girt is a shore town, accessible by Route 35 and close to other popular shore destinations such as Manasquan, Belmar, Spring Lake, and Point Pleasant. The average commuting time for Sea Girt residents is 34.5 minutes.

Voices from the Community
Sea Girt's location brings in many visitors during the summer months. Residents want the library to serve all members of the community but to ensure increased focus is on serving year-round residents over visitors.

Economy and Business

Sea Girt, with many resident retirees, has a 42.7% employment rate which is below the New Jersey average of 61.8%.Of residents who are employed, about 20% are self-employed, 27% work for local, state, or federal government, and 50.8% are employees of private companies. The number of self-employed residents in Sea Girt exceeds the state average of 4.6%.

There are a small number of businesses located within the borough of Sea Girt, most are small and family owned.

> **Every town needs a library. The function of libraries [has] changed in the last 25 years but [is] still important to the fabric of the community.** -Sea Girt Resident

Data from U.S. Census and NJ School Performance Report

|	Borough of Sea Girt	State of New Jersey
Total Population	1,866	
Median Age	56 +/- 3.5	40 +/- 0.1
Under 18 years old	16% +/- 4.3%	22% +/- 0.1%
Median Household Income	$165,000	$85,000
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	75% +/- 5.4%	41% +/- 0.2%
Home Ownership Rate	96% +/- 3.3%	64% +/- 0.3%
Occupied Housing Units with Four or More Bedrooms	72% +/- 7.6%	26% +/- 0.2%

Sources
U.S. Census Bureau Profile
NJ School Performance Report (2019-2020)
Data Axle Reference Solutions
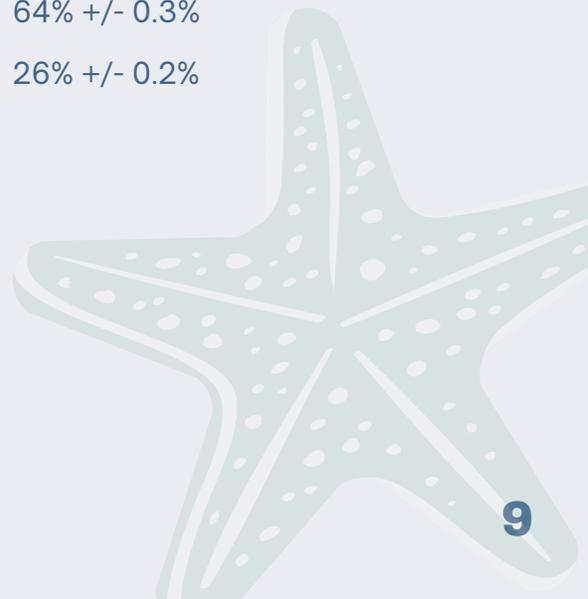
survey responses

The picture that emerges from the community survey is one that shows participants, library card holders and non-card holders, who want the library to represent the close-knit community in which they live. Many of the respondents would enjoy a fiscally responsible expansion of space, collections, and services. The vast majority of survey participants are highly satisfied with their library and very highly regard the staff at the library.

- About a third of the respondents use the library in-person. About one in seven residents uses the library virtually, while one in ten uses the library both in-person and virtually.

- Over forty percent of non-library users cite buying their own books and using their own computer as the reason they do not use the library.

- Respondents felt adding a meeting room, expanding the children's room and adult reading areas, and adding additional collection space were the priority for any renovation/expansion. Many respondents also expressed concern about the potential loss of the historical feel of the current building.

- The most selected library shared values included having a great staff, bringing the community together, and investing in the library building to provide a comfortable and welcoming environment.

- While respondents expressed high regard for the library, the most consistent recommendations were an increase in access to books, print and digital; increased hours; and more space in the library.

- When describing the community they want Sea Girt to be, the most common responses were in support of a safe, welcoming, and close-knit community that values its history.

- Residents have faced a variety of challenges in the past few years, particularly accessing learning and personal growth opportunities, keeping up with new technology, obtaining reliable health information, and safeguarding against identity theft.

The Participants

Do you have a Sea Girt Library Card?
Total Respondents 456
Yes 59%
No 41%

Are you a resident or part-time resident of Sea Girt?
Yes 82%
No 18%

What is your age group?
13-18 1%
19-24 2%
25-34 6%
35-44 19%
45-54 21%
55-64 25%
65 + 27%

Pie chart labels:
- 19-24 2.3%
- 25-34 6.1%
- 35-44 19%
- 45-54 20.5%
- 55-64 24.9%
- 65+ 26.6%
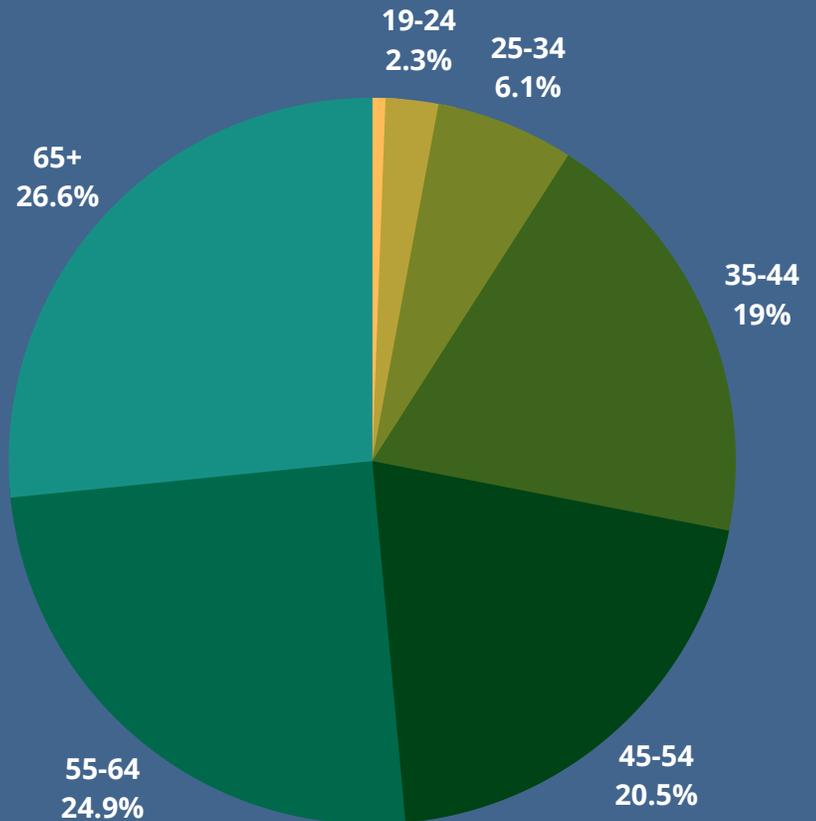
Top Ranked Responses

Please describe your normal use of your library.

- 35% I primarily use the library to check out print materials, attend in-person programs, and/or use the facility.
- 14% I primarily use the library virtually by downloading books, using online resources or attending online programs.
- 10% I regularly visit the library AND use the library virtually.
- 7% I use the library to attend programs only.
- 34% I don't use the library.

If you do not use the library, what reason(s) most accurately describe why you don't use the library?

- 43% I buy my own books and other materials.
- 42% I use my own computer at home or other location.
- 17% Too busy/no time.
- 11% The hours are not convenient.
- 11% I use another library.
- 7% Facility uncomfortable and needs investment.
- 7% Other - Not enough quiet space, not enough access to electricity, unpleasant past experiences, staff not friendly/welcoming, lack of transportation, insufficient selection of books/eBooks, avoiding public spaces during Covid, mostly read eBooks on Kindle.

During your visits to the library, which of the following are the most important to you and your family?

Ranked from Most Important to Least:
1. Book Browsing
2. Studying/Quiet Space
3. Newspaper and Magazine Reading Area
4. Public WiFi
5. Children's Room
6. Programs for Adults
7. Programs for Children
8. Public Computers
9. Book Sales

If you have visited the Sea Girt Library in the past three years, please describe how you felt about the facility.

Summary of Themes:
- Safe, clean, welcoming
- Well-organized
- Quaint, charming, adorable, cozy, classic, gives feeling of community
- Small, crowded, not enough space for books or programs
- Concerns about cost/need of expansion
- Convenient location

What could the Library do to improve its space?

- 34% Renovate/Expand the Adult Reading Area
- 28% Add meeting room space
- 27% Renovate/Expand Children's Room
- 27% Add seating options with electrical access
- 20% Add small private group study spaces
- 14% Add Teen Space
- 13% Add ADA Accessibility
- 12% Other - Add space for books, improve outdoor area, update bathrooms
- 10% Add additional updated public computers
- 25% None of the above
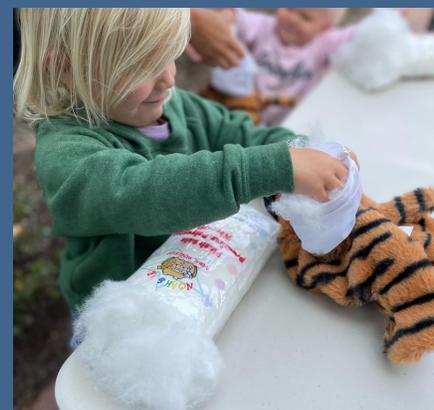
66 The library is a huge part of Sea Girt that should be **cherished**.

-Sea Girt Resident

What do you value the most about the library?

Summary of Themes:
- It is a local gem
- The excellent staff
- Sense of community
- Access to eBooks
- Summer Reading
- Location and convenience
- Library programs
- Kanopy streaming service
- A quiet space to study and relax
- How welcoming the library is to visitors to Sea Girt

> **❝** [The library is] a home away from home.   -Sea Girt Resident

Please pick three of the most important library shared values.

The Library will:
- 75% offer a great library experience by hiring friendly, knowledgeable, and helpful staff.
- 67% build community by engaging with and connecting Sea Girt's population.
- 47% invest in the facility to provide a comfortable and welcoming environment.
- 35% promote the literacy, learning, and civic engagement necessary for a healthy democracy.
- 29% be careful stewards of public resources and value integrity as a cornerstone of all that we do.
- 28% invest in the technology required to create and assist digitally literate citizens.
- 20% believe we can be more effective by collaborating with other community organizations.

Please pick up to three of the most important library strengths.

- 71% Well-trained, engaged staff providing excellent customer service
- 59% Convenient operating hours
- 55% Safe and clean building
- 26% Ample, attractive interior physical space (meeting/study rooms, display spaces)
- 25% Expansive physical and electronic collections (including Overdrive, Hoopla, Kanopy, etc)
- 23% Library working within community partnerships
- 21% Diverse assortment of well-attended programs

How does the library help you reach your goals?

Summary of Themes:
- Access to reading and literacy for children and adults
- Community bonding and connection, a community center
- Helps with relaxation and mental wellness
- Lifelong learning opportunities and opportunities to expand one's mind
- Family bonding and activities
- Access to downloadable materials helps the residents unable to access the library
- Support for small business owners

What could the library improve overall?

Summary of Themes:
- More space, expanded facility
- Increase service hours
- More access to print and digital materials
- More large print books
- Space for students to meet to work on homework and class projects
- Meeting room space
- Larger children's room
- Join with other local libraries
- Increase access to Kanopy
- More space to work
- Increase communication about library and its programs
- Perfect the way it is
- Improve outdoor area, include toddler playground like Brielle Library

Overall, how would you rate your satisfaction with the Sea Girt Library? (Out of 1-5, with 5 being the best)

Average of all responses: 4.32

In a sentence or more, please describe what type of community you want Sea Girt to be?

- Friendly, welcoming, caring, inclusive, tolerant
- Small town feel, close knit community, community pride
- Active community with events for all ages
- Safe and clean
- Less political differences, not divided (Example: Paddle tennis in Crescent Park)
- Low local taxes, good stewards of tax dollars
- Town that values its history, preserve old buildings
- Environmentally conscious
- A well informed inquisitive citizenry

What are the two or three most important issues when it comes to the community?

Survey responses fell into three main categories:

Social Issues
- Inclusiveness
- Access to excellent schools and learning opportunities
- More offerings for teens
- Divisive around community issues, more civility, respect for others
- Opportunities for volunteers
- Community pride

Outdoor Issues
- Safety and cleanliness
- Maintenance of public spaces
- Speeding/traffic
- Keeping that small town feel
- Clean beaches
- Parking
- Too many trees being cut down/controlling development
- ADA access
- Public Transportation
- Lack of a "central gathering place where people can meet"

Governmental Issues
- Taxes/Fiscal Responsibility
- Valuing input from residents and governmental transparency
- Balancing of services between Sea Girt residents and visitors

What are some challenges you have faced in the last few years?

- 44% Continuing lifetime learning and personal growth
- 31% Learning new technologies
- 17% Obtaining reliable health information
- 18% Online security/identity theft
- 16% Financial planning
- 15% Ensuring opportunity for children
- 13% Isolation
- 12% Obtaining affordable healthcare
- 11% Running a small business
- 11% Childcare and a safe space for my children
- 10% Employment or underemployment
- 8% Learning about diversity and equity
- 7% Mobility
- 18% Other - work and life stress, health issues, eldercare, inability to meet more residents, COVID-19, activities for children

focus groups

About 50 people participated in four different focus groups. Three of the focus groups engaged specific demographics: senior citizens, working adults (many of whom were parents), and members of community organizations. The fourth group included individuals who indicated on the community survey that they were interested in further participation.

Consultants facilitated the groups online or in-person: one of the groups met virtually, two met in the library, and one met in the municipal building. To encourage participants to feel comfortable speaking freely, employees of the library and Board members were not present. The questions started broadly and narrowed to focus on specific library services.

What type of community do you want to live in?

Three out of four groups mentioned they wanted to live in a community that was welcoming and friendly. Additional descriptors included:

- Family oriented
- Valuing volunteerism
- Sense of community; could be further encouraged
- Inclusive
- One that balances the needs of established residents versus developers

Why do you think it is important for communities to have libraries?

- Community center; hub of the community
- Stimulate interest in reading, especially for children
- Residents need a place to go to congregate
- Important to have access to technology and digital resources
- Place that brings community together, no matter the age of the resident
- Connection to what else is going on in town
- Library as refuge (for example, in a power outage the library should have a generator)

What would you like to see at or from the library?

- More programs: arts and crafts, musical programs, CPR, authors, teens
- Expanded programming for technology training, teen programming

- Expanded hours, more consistent schedule of open hours (library hours were mentioned in all four focus groups)
- More space for programs and meetings, including sufficient space for municipal and community groups to meet
- Larger book collection
- Space to sit down
- Displays of local artists and local history

Finally, the groups were asked to specifically address library buildings and grounds, customer service, and the library website or catalog.

Library buildings and grounds:
- Need meeting space, recreation space, space for arts and crafts
- Recognize the need for expansion; request that the library share ideas and plans along the way
- Charming, endearing, historic - but not sufficient to provide good service
- There's very positive support from the residents and the Council; an expansion should be outlined and pursued
- Preserve the history of the library
- Keep in mind cost of expansion and keep to what is necessary

Customer service:
- Excellent!
- Great personalized environment
- Lisa is a great leader; never says no
- This is the library's strong suit
- Great volunteer opportunities
- All emails are very informative and useful

Library resources:
- Value Libby - ebooks, audiobooks
- Reader's advisory is great
- We need more books
- A makerspace and a 3D printer would be great
- Would like museum passes

" [The library is] a friendly place to explore reading opportunities, and it could be a more effective gathering place. There are relatively few opportunities in town for citizens to come together.   -Sea Girt Resident

vision

The Heart of Our Community

mission

The Sea Girt Library is a welcoming place that connects and enriches the entire community.

goals

Goal 1
Strengthen the bonds with our community.

Goal 2
Improve access to library resources.

Goal 3
Expand program offerings for all ages.

Goal 4
Create a welcoming and comfortable place.

objectives

Goal 1: Strengthen the bonds with our community.

- Facilitate community connections, bringing groups together.
- Expand support for the school curriculum and activities.
- Offer a meeting space for community gatherings, whether sponsored by the library or other community groups.

Goal 2: Improve access to library resources.

- Research demand for access to the library, including library hours and necessary staffing.
- Update and expand library website.
- Undertake a public information campaign to expand awareness and increase use of digital resources (such as OverDrive's Libby for ebooks and audio books; Kanopy for streaming movies and documentaries; Hoopla for ebooks, audiobooks and streaming content; and Flipster for digital magazines).
- Establish a technology training plan for residents and staff to ensure optimal use of library resources.

Goal 3: Expand program offerings for all ages.

- Assess timing and scheduling of programs on an annual basis
- Analyze current barriers to program offerings and identify creative solutions
- Create opportunities to continually receive input from residents
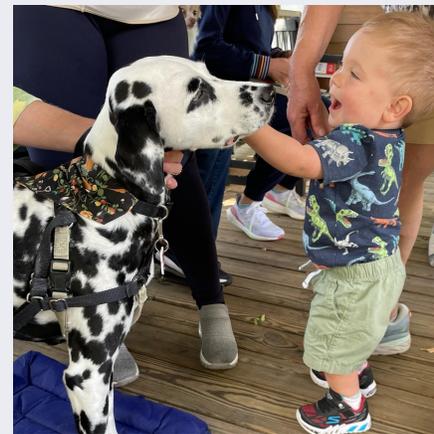
Goal 4: Create a welcoming and comfortable place.

- Create a vision that meets the needs of a contemporary library and recognizes the importance of the historical nature of the library building
- Evaluate use of the current space and identify possible improvements both in the short- and long-term
- Develop a capital plan and actively pursue an expansion and renovation of the library building
- Communicate a clear, transparent description of plans for the library's future.

how to use this plan

This strategic plan is the result of input from the community and library staff. It has been shaped by data about where the library has been, and feedback about how the library can best serve the community and your stakeholders. As a result, it holds information and recommendations that can be used to strengthen and guide library management in a number of ways. These include:

Sharing

This plan should be shared with anyone who would benefit from understanding where the library has been, and where it can go. Communication about this plan can be shared with:

- Staff
- Borough officials
- Residents (through the website)
- Friends of the Library/Foundation
- Community partners
- Surrounding libraries
- Job applicants

Planning

Does an existing service or program help the library meet your stated goals, or would those resources be better applied to a new service? How do you meet the seemingly unlimited needs of the community with a limited amount of resources, time, funding, and staff effort? The library's Vision and Mission, and Goals and Objectives can help guide the library's annual planning, and inform difficult decisions around the expenditure of limited assets.

Evaluating

This plan serves as a rubric for measuring your success. Oftentimes, the assessments made by members of library administration differ from considerations of those outside of library management. For this reason, we encourage libraries to provide opportunities for feedback – for your entire community, and all areas of library staff – to evaluate your library's success in meeting the stated goals and objectives.

Budgeting

When developing your next budget, ensure that your library's goals and objectives are reflected in your budget. This strategic plan should also be a regular part of any budget presentation or request for funds.

Reviewing Policies

Are your current policies reflective of the Vision and Mission statement and the Goals and Objectives in this plan? For example: if you want a "welcoming and comfortable space," is the policy under consideration welcoming to everyone? Who does it include? And who is being left out?

Recruiting

Are you recruiting the staff you need to meet your Goals and Objectives? We encourage you to use this strategic plan as a rubric for developing employment postings and hiring practices. Through job listings and an easy-to-find location on your website, all applicants should be able to review the strategic plan to see what your library values.

Working with Partners

Sharing the strategic plan with potential partners, including other libraries, may create new opportunities to work together for collective impact.

Holding Staff Meetings

We recommend actively engaging with this plan - share and discuss the strategic plan with all staff and volunteers. Simply making the plan available does not ensure the plan has been read and understood. Reviewing and discussing will help library staff and volunteers become involved with the stated goals, and see how their own feedback is reflected in the plan.