



dc public library

Know Your Neighborhood DC Public Library Strategic Plan 2017–2021 Executive Summary



The District of Columbia Public Library (DCPL, or the Library) is a cherished institution whose users reflect the diversity of the District—new arrivals as well as longtime residents, and residents from an array of ethnicities, backgrounds and orientations. Yet despite D.C.’s great progress and rich diversity, many residents continue to face challenges to find secure jobs, learn a marketable skill, succeed in school or acquire basic information and computer literacy skills.

To strengthen its legacy as a vital community institution serving all residents, the Library is committed to introducing new programs and services and customizing its offerings to better serve each neighborhood—particularly in ways that help those who need it most. This strategic plan, which will serve as the essential roadmap to guide the Library’s work for the next five years, represents its answer to these challenges. To inform the creation of the plan and ensure that every voice was heard in the process, the Library conducted an intensive citywide community needs assessment in late 2015 that reached thousands of residents. Valuable input was provided by more than 2,000 residents and 200 library staff members through various means that included a phone survey, community meetings, focus groups and web surveys, through which the Library:

- Collected input from residents across D.C. via a phone or online survey;
- Engaged the public in community conversations held at branches throughout the District;
- Hosted a series of focus groups for community partners and service providers representing D.C.’s citizens; and
- Conducted a survey and focus groups for library staff.

More than 2,000 residents and 200 library staff provided valuable input into the strategic plan.

Input Method	Participants
Phone Survey	600
Web Survey	1,526
Community Meetings: Tenley-Friendship, Shaw and Anacostia Libraries	50
Staff Focus Groups	74
Staff Survey	150
Partner and Service Provider Focus Groups	72

Understanding that participation with the Library may be the best indicator of its value to the community, the Library will know that it has been successful if by 2022:

75% District residents have active DC Public Library accounts.

5 Million Library items are borrowed annually.

5 Million Visits to library locations and outreach events are made annually.

That vision is captured in one simple principle: Know Your Neighborhood.

Across the District, residents said they envision the Library of the future as a community learning hub, with neighborhood branches serving their communities in unique ways. The Library also found that quality books and other traditional offerings remain of top importance to residents, and many residents are still unaware of the Library's existing programs and newer services.

Thanks in part to this extensive community outreach, a vision for the Library's next five years emerged. That vision is captured in one simple principle: Know Your Neighborhood, which means that individual libraries should tailor their services to reflect the unique communities they serve. This includes an emphasis on advancing equity among all residents, especially among those who have no or limited access to resources and services.

Through its strategic plan, DCPL commits to advancing four priority areas to improve the lives and well-being of District residents: 1) Reading, 2) Digital Citizenship, 3) Strong Communities and 4) Local History and Culture. In order to successfully implement the plan, the Library will focus on Stewardship to ensure alignment of resources and responsiveness to community needs.

The Library has established three important indicators of its success to achieve the overarching goals of the five-year strategic plan, outlined below. Understanding that participation with the Library may be the best indicator of its value to the community, the Library will know that it has been successful if by 2022:

- Seventy-five percent of District residents have active DC Public Library accounts;
- Five million library items are borrowed annually; and
- Five million visits to library locations and outreach events are made annually.

Each priority area and its corresponding objectives reflect a vital element of library programming and services.

READING: Support new readers and cultivate a love of reading.

The Library will provide services and programs that build and cultivate literacy and a love of reading.

The District is widely considered one of the most literate cities in the country, and this passion for reading is reflected in users' active use of library resources, from traditional books and magazines to e-books and audiobooks.

Yet for all its passionate readers, the District is not unlike other cities across the country that are confronting distressing literacy and achievement gaps among adults and children alike. For this reason, a major focus of this priority area will be to connect the residents who can most benefit from literacy assistance with new and expanded library programs and services to help them succeed. The entire city prospers when more residents are literate and reading.

To support new readers and cultivate a love of reading, the Library will:

- Promote a culture of literacy and the great benefits of reading.
- Connect public library services to students and educators.
- Expand services for adults who are developing readers.
- Ensure reliable and convenient access to a responsive library collection of books and other materials.

DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP: Prepare residents for life online.

Support digital citizenship by providing technology, internet access and training.

District residents turn to libraries for both technology and internet access and opportunities to develop their digital skills. The Library's digital services are particularly important to seniors, African-American and Latino residents.

Furthermore, while regular and constant access to the internet is becoming increasingly possible for a greater number of people, the complexities associated with that access demand a greater effort from libraries to ensure that residents are prepared for life online. Understanding the importance of online security, digital etiquette and related digital literacies is crucial as residents spend more of their time online.

To better serve the District's traditionally vulnerable populations and prepare them for success in career and life, the Library will:

- Ensure residents have the skills to navigate an increasingly digital world.
- Expand access to technology and the internet in the communities that need it most.



STRONG COMMUNITIES: Ensure neighborhood libraries are vital centers of community learning and civic engagement.

Strengthen communities through services, programs, outreach and increased use of the Library's physical campus.

Library branches have always been central public spaces in the communities they serve. They are an extension of their neighborhoods; a gathering place for long-time residents and newcomers alike to come together and learn from one another. Throughout the community engagement process, residents expressed great interest in the Library expanding its role in the community. They also indicated that more outreach would allow DCPL to better serve the residents who depend on it the most and would most benefit from its services.

To build on this opportunity, the Library will:

- Reach low-users and non-users with new services.
- Increase use of the Library's physical campus.

LOCAL HISTORY AND CULTURE: Foster understanding and appreciation of what makes D.C. unique.

Connect residents to the District's past, present and future by providing access to, experiences in, and support for local history and culture.

A source of great pride for District residents is the city's dynamic culture—a combination of rich community history complemented with new neighbors and immigrants from all over the world. According to the needs assessment, residents want library branches to embrace their potential as cultural hubs in the diverse neighborhoods they serve.

To celebrate D.C.'s history and its constantly evolving culture, the Library will:

- Strengthen local history collections in collaboration with community partners.
- Offer residents a variety of local history and culture programs.
- Ensure D.C.'s creative community can rely on the Library for the resources it needs to flourish.

Achieving the Plan — STEWARDSHIP: Ensure the Library is positioned to respond to the changing needs of the community.

In order to accomplish the four preceding goals, the Library must focus on its own internal operations so that it can be responsive to emerging trends, changing city demographics and new technologies. By being a good steward of its resources — securing new resources for the Library and better aligning, allocating and strengthening existing resources — the Library will better serve District residents.

To successfully implement the strategic plan, the Library will:

- Align library resources with community needs.
- Plan and design library spaces to better serve the community.
- Use data to improve all aspects of library services.
- Pursue external funding and resources to deepen the library's impact.
- Increase awareness and understanding of evolving library services.

These priority areas are described in detail in the strategic plan. Together, they form a cohesive, actionable plan that positions the Library on a path toward growth and success.

Fulfilling the plan's vision in five years will require the engagement of everyone who will support or benefit from these efforts, and the Library welcomes ongoing input from all residents every step of the way. With help from community partners, library leaders and staff, and, most importantly, the community members whom the Library serves, this shared vision will become a reality, contributing to more prepared and prosperous residents.

With help from community partners, library leaders and staff, and, most importantly, the community members whom the Library serves, this shared vision will become a reality, contributing to more prepared and prosperous residents.